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TWIXT PROMISE AND VOW

AND OTHER STORIES

BY RUTH ELLIOTT.

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"'HERE SHE IS, MR. LANGLEY! HERE SHE IS, AND ME, TOO!'"—*Page* 59.

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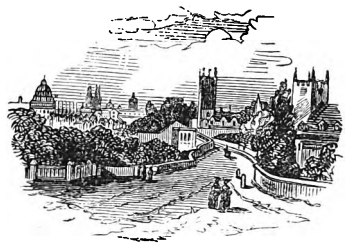
'TWIXT PROMISE AND VOW,

And Other Stories.

BY

RUTH ELLIOTT,

AUTHOR OF "JOHN LYON," "UNDECEIVED," "JAMES DARYLL," "A VOICE FROM THE SEA," "TALKS WITH THE BAIRNS," ETC., ETC.



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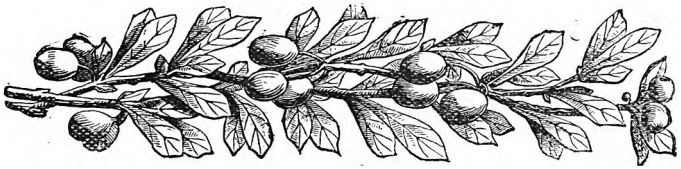

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'Twixt Promise and Vow.

HALESBY HOUSE was in a state of wild confusion. It was Christmas Eve. Troops of children rushed from room to room, upstairs and downstairs, at their own sweet will and pleasure, unchecked and unreproved. There were huge roaring fires in the rooms below, and cheerful, glowing ones in the bedrooms, making them snug retreats for those who had secrets to impart and confidences to exchange.

Perfect freedom was the order of the day, and the wildest pranks were played with impunity. No one complained,—in fact, everybody laughed,—so licence was extended.

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Busiest among the busy moved Millicent Duncan, the little Merediths' governess: now nailing up a refractory wreath of holly and mistletoe; now bathing a scratched and wounded hand; now tying a trailing sash; now picking up an unfortunate little tumbler, and kissing the place to make it well. It was "Miss Duncan! Miss Duncan!" on all sides, from the stately Mrs. Meredith herself, to the merry youngsters who played Bo-peep through the banisters. Everybody wanted Miss Duncan, and with unfailing good temper she obeyed the ceaseless call.

At last all the younger ones were fast asleep in bed, and a quiet fell upon the house. Little groups were gathered together in corners, discussing various topics of mutual interest, and there was a delightful atmosphere of pleasant mystery pervading the whole house.

Pausing at the drawing-room door, Millicent looked round. Near the fire Mrs. Meredith and her two sisters were in solemn conclave, and the subject of their conversation was not far off. A pretty, dark-haired girl, with soft, grey eyes, and a blush which deepened as she glanced at the smiling group; for was not this her first appearance in the new character of the betrothed? and was not

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he coming by the last train to take his place among the family?

And Maud and Beatrice, her pretty twin cousins, looked at her with a comical air of respect and curiosity, and plied her with eager questions. Millicent heard one sentence: "You will be married in white satin, Bertie, *of course*," and involuntarily she smiled. Engaged but yesterday, and already thinking of the wedding dress! There was but one step between the promise and the vow with these young novices.

But suddenly the smile vanished, and the girlish face grew pale and weary as the thought came—"How many more long steps between *our* promise and vow?"

At that moment one of the merry group looked up, and saw her standing in the doorway.

"Oh, Miss Duncan, do come and listen!" she cried. "Fancy Bertie going to be married! Isn't it fun?"

"I don't see anything funny in it," said the bride-to-be, with a comical assumption of dignity. "I think it is not a subject for joking, Maud."

"I'm not joking! Don't be dignified, Bertie, or you will spoil to-morrow. Show Miss Duncan his portrait, do!"

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But this was indignantly refused, and Bertie blushed crimson as she frowned at the unfortunate betrayer of confidence. Had she not told her on no account to mention what that precious little locket contained? Of course she had, and now she was shouting it out for everybody to hear.

"I'm so sorry! I quite forgot!" murmured penitent Maud.

"You always are sorry afterward. You should be sorry before, and then it would be of some use," was the severe reply.

Millicent was no restraint: they chatted away as freely before her as they did when she was absent. In fact, there could be no restraint, seeing that she knew all the secrets already. Why, she had been the first to see that wonderful portrait, and hear all about the original; but she *could* keep a secret, and had said nothing about it.

Confidences were soon put an end to by the entrance of "the boys." Was it ever possible to talk secrets when *boys* were in the room?

Then the groups amalgamated, and Laurie and Lily, the two who never could be together without concocting mischief, were discovered behind the curtains "*making plans!*" Everybody knew what that meant, and the culprits were ordered to confess

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at once what they were up to, or—— What ought to have followed the *or* no one ever knew, and the wicked faces of the conspirators only grew more radiantly wicked, while Laurie, aged sixteen, indulged in a series of winks, which for once in his life were allowed to pass unreproved by his dignified mother.

"Nearly half-past," said Mr. Meredith, coming in with his watch in his hand, and glancing slily at Bertie. "It is almost time for the down train."

"Plenty of time yet," said handsome Alec, stealing a piece of mistletoe from the huge bunch over the door, and looking round the room for his little flirt of a cousin Olga, who was watching him from a safe retreat beside her mother's chair. Seeing the impregnable position of the enemy, he relinquished designs for the present, and turned his attention to Bertie.

"Any message, Bertie? Any billet-what's-his-names? I'll promise to deliver them safely the moment he descends from his chariot—I mean his Pullman."

"Leave Bertie alone, and look after your own affairs, Alec, they are not flourishing," said mischievous Maud, with a significant glance at her brother Guy, who at that very moment was besieging the

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citadel and taking Castle Olga by storm. At the audacity of the thing Alec stood aghast, and, shaking his fist at triumphant Guy, went out to meet the train. Three or four of the boys went with him, and scarcely had the hall door banged when a shrill whistle announced the near approach of the late down train.

Guy began to whistle the appropriate tune, "See the Conquering Hero comes," which sent Bertie flying out of the room with burning cheeks.

"It is a shame to tease her so," said papa pityingly; "it will be your turn some day, Mr. Guy."

Whereupon that young gentleman answered that he had no objection whatever; the sooner the day arrived the better pleased he should be. He made another remark, *sotto voce*, to Olga, and received a very uncompromising reply, but what that remark was remained a mystery.

Among them, but not one of them, Millicent listened and watched. It seemed as if the evening never would go, and yet the clock steadily ticked on. She had some curiosity to see this hero of Bertie's; this first recognised lover in the family of twenty-four grandchildren; and perhaps no more critical eye than hers met the young man as he came in,

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quiet and self-possessed, but with the faintest possible trace of excitement in his handsome face.

She would not be wanted any more now, she knew. They would gather round the fire, a merry family party, to wait for the waits, and she was only the governess. If she had stayed, they would all have treated her kindly, and she would have got her share of Christmas greeting, but with innate delicacy she felt that the heads of the families would prefer the exclusively family gathering, and she went upstairs to her own room.

Once in her sanctum, she threw off all disguise, and a weary look of care settled on the gentle face. Taking a letter from its hiding-place, as near her heart as ever Bertie's costly locket, she bent over it with wistful eyes.

"It is weary waiting, darling," it ran, "and hope deferred maketh the heart sick. I did not know to what I was binding my bonnie darling when I made her promise, five long years ago, to wait for me. Is she tired? Shall I release her? *I cannot!* I have asked myself the question: Is it right to keep her wearing out her bright young life, waiting for what still seems a far-off future? Is it just and honourable? And then comes the answer: She will never love another while I am alive, and I take courage

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and hope. What would be the use of liberty to one who loves her chains?"

Hot scalding tears fell upon the paper, and dropping her head on her hand Millicent sat motionless. The waits came to sing the accustomed carols, but she scarcely heard them. Then the merry bells proclaimed the birth of another Christmas Day; a day of joy and glad thanksgiving to many, of crushed and dying hopes, of bitter memories to others.

Five long years ago, in the sunny days of undimmed happiness, Millicent Duncan had given her heart and promised her hand to Robert Graham, the companion of her earliest years. They had romped together as children, gone to school together, learned from the same books, and in the natural course of events had fallen in love with each other. But troubles, even then, were darkening their horizon, and the death of Millicent's aunt left her alone in the world. It was the old story of no means, and no kindly relatives, and the brave Scotch lassie left her native land, and gladly took the situation of governess to the little Merediths, while Robert worked on in his office, hoping each day to see some chance of offering his darling a home.

There was little chance of it on sixty pounds a year, and situations were difficult to obtain; so,

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hoping and despairing, and with never one disloyal thought to each other, they had worked on and waited.

A regular old-fashioned Christmas Day dawned, bright and frosty, with icicles drooping under the eaves, and myriads of diamonds glistening and gleaming on every snow-laden bough.

The enormous table presented a curious appearance at breakfast time; beside each plate stood a pyramid of parcels and boxes, of various shapes and sizes, which elicited screams of excitement from the children.

Millicent glanced at her plate, scarcely knowing whether to expect anything or not. There were three or four little parcels, and an envelope; she knew what was in the envelope, and wanted to throw it in the fire, for, with all her gentle face and soft, sweet eyes, the poor governess was proud. But subduing the rebellious feeling, she opened the envelope, and taking out the bank note met Mr. Meredith's eye, and bowed in grateful acknowledgment, as was expected.

There was an ivory fan, and a carte case from the twins, and a gold pencil from Bertie; that was all. But she was pleased with them, and thanked the givers a great deal more than they had any right to expect. They all liked her, and took their troubles

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and pleasures to her, but they did not deem it necessary to think about presents for her.

"Does your head ache, Miss Duncan?" asked one of the children, noticing her heavy eyes and weary look.

"Yes, dear," she answered; and might have added, "and heart, too!" but if she had, who would have heeded?

How the day went she scarcely knew.

There was service in the morning, but only the elder ones went, and she stayed at home with the children.

It was no easy matter to keep them within bounds, and they taxed her patience to the utmost.

It was the fashion to dine at two on Christmas Day, on account of the children, who always expected to dine with their elders on high days and holidays. After dinner there was a general dispersing; the little ones went to the nursery to amuse themselves by making as much noise as they pleased. The library was abandoned to the smokers, while the drawing-rooms were seized by the "young men and maidens." The elders retired for a comfortable nap, and the one pair of lovers retreated to the cosy little breakfast-room, hoping to be left in undisturbed possession. Vain hope!

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Coming downstairs, after putting her youngest charge, baby Nell, to sleep on her own bed, out of sound of the noisy nursery crew, Millicent went to the breakfast room, attracted by the quiet. Opening the door, she surprised Bertie in the act of placing a tiny winter rose in Mr. Oakley's coat, while his yellow moustache was in suspicious proximity to the pretty, arch face.

With a start of dismay and an inaudible apology, she closed the door, and sought refuge in the dining-room; but here Laurie and Lily were holding counsel with what looked very much like horsehair and burnt charcoal on the table before them. It was evident that a third person would be *de trop*, so she turned away.

The merry voices in the drawing-rooms did not tempt her. She could hear Guy and Alec sparring, and Olga's merry, wicked laugh, and the school boys and girls reciting their parts for the evening's charades. The folding-doors between the rooms were closed to prevent one side overhearing the other; but each seemed too busy with their own to trouble about anything else.

She knew that soon she would be called, so it was no use going to her own room, though she longed to lie down beside the sleeping baby, and rest and be

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still. There was a tall statue of Pallas half-way up the stairs, and she took her seat at its feet, leaning her head against the classic folds of its marble dress. The dim light from the coloured oriel fell upon her, bathing her in rich purple, and crimson, and blue, and she took a childish pleasure in drawing one long soft curl through the glowing colours. But she was not left long in possession of her hiding-place. One of the children came racing out to tell her she was wanted, and reluctantly she came down.

She found the room in an uproar. Marjory, at the last minute, had turned coward, and would not take her part. In vain they threatened, expostulated, entreated! She was adamant to all.

"Why don't you have Maud? She will do," she said.

"No, she won't! She isn't tall enough, and she is so silly! She'd laugh, and spoil it all. Oh, Miss Duncan, isn't it a shame! Marjory won't be the bride."

Seeing Marjory was really determined, and knowing how useless it was to argue with her, Millicent looked round for a substitute.

"Elsie will do."

Elsie shrieked. "Miss Duncan! I should drop down in the middle!"

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"It's no use, Miss Duncan," said Ethel despairingly. "There is only Marjory who *could* take the part, and it is a shame of her to back out."

"I'm the bridegroom," said Alec; "and I consider myself insulted."

Millicent had her suspicions that this was the very cause of Marjory's withdrawal; she and Alec were not on very good terms. "Won't they exchange and let you have Olga from the next room?" she suggested, and Alec shrugged his shoulders:

"No such luck! Look here, Miss Duncan, will you be the bride? I'll promise to behave."

At this sudden proposal Ethel and Maud jumped up and seized her. "Miss Duncan, you must; you shall! Now, don't say no; please don't! There is no one else."

It was not a very flattering reason for giving the part to her, and she did not wish to take it. It jarred on her feelings to dress up in the white dress and flowing veil which were prepared for the bride; it seemed almost a sacrilege, a disloyalty to *him* to play at what he would give his life almost to make a reality. But they would not take no, and unwilling to spoil their pleasure, she went through her part, and was rewarded by hearing them say that she made a better bride than Marjory. She did not mind

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it so much then, but when the evening came, and she had to appear before the whole party, her heart sank and her courage gave way. Going to Marjory's room she begged her to take the part and let her off, but that young lady was offended at Alec's ready acceptance of her refusal, and nothing could induce her to pardon the offence.

With trembling hands she prepared for what was to her a terrible ordeal. Maud and Ethel helped her, and threw over her head the graceful veil, and then led her in triumph to the glass. She scarcely knew herself; scarcely recognised her own face, flushed as it was with excitement, and framed with the falling lace.

"Oh, Miss Duncan! you are pretty," exclaimed little Clyde, and he was not the only one who thought so.

"I had no idea Miss Duncan was so pretty," said Mrs. Stanton. "Is it judicious, my dear, with Guy at such an impressionable age?"

"Oh, she is engaged," replied Mrs. Meredith in a tone of satisfaction. "I took care to ascertain that before I engaged her. He is in Edinburgh—she is Scotch, you know—and they cannot afford to be married, so I hope I shall be able to keep her till Lily and Thyra are educated."

This was Millicent's last part, and as she walked across the hall to the library, which was used as a

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dressing-room, her self-control gave way, and a large tear rolled slowly down her cheek. It would never do to give way there, and with nervous haste she tried to disentangle the wreath of orange-blossom which clung to her hair. At that moment a servant looked in: "Miss Duncan is wanted."

Wondering who could want her at such a time, she went to the door.

"Who wants me, Dean?"

"I do," replied a familiar voice, and a tall, bearded man stepped forward and took her hand.

Was it a dream? She scarcely knew. Inquisitive eyes were watching, and she could not speak. The breakfast-room was empty, and not till they were alone, with the door shut upon all the world beside, did she realize the truth. She was forced to realize it then, for Robert Graham gave her pretty strong proof of his presence.

"What does all this mean?" he asked, touching the veil. "Have I come just too late?"

"It is only a charade," she said, lifting up her face, bright with the light of happiness too deep for words. "I did not know I was putting it on to welcome you."

"It is an omen, darling, my bonnie bride. No more waiting now—no more weary years."

She did not understand, but he soon explained.

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"I saw the advertisement in the paper, but did not dare to answer it. What chance would a poor Scotch clerk have in such a place as London, where there are hundreds of men waiting for posts? It was Mr. Grant's doing; he wrote, and the result is I have got the place, with a commencing salary of two hundred pounds."

It might have been two thousand by the way Millicent listened. Two hundred! It was a fortune to those who had been obliged to be content with only sixty.

"And I do not mean to wait any longer," he said. "'Twixt promise and vow has been a weary while, dear one, and I am tired. You won't say no?"

He turned up her face and read the answer in her eyes. No; she would not refuse *that* request.

It does not much concern any one but themselves what followed: the schemes for the future, the anticipation of happy days to come. The news soon spread that Miss Duncan's "*friend*" from Scotland had come, and Mrs. Meredith augured evil tidings.

"I shall have to look out for another governess for Lily and Thyra," she said pathetically. "He would never have come all the way from Edinburgh unless something had happened."

Nevertheless she was very sympathetic, and treated

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Robert Graham with the utmost courtesy. He did not wish to join the great supper party, but Millicent thought they would not like to have the cordial invitation refused, so he consented.

Looking round upon the merry faces, Millicent exulted in the consciousness that there was no nobler-looking man present than her Robert Graham, and he, though he could not but admire the bright-faced twins and bewitching little Olga, thought that none could compare with his Scotch lassie, who had waited for him so bravely and so long.

"A five years' promise and a life-long vow," he murmured, as they wished each other good-night. "I shall claim the *vow* before a month has passed, my darling."

"And are you really going to be married, Miss Duncan?" cried Ethel, enchanted with this new romance. "Oh, do let me be a bridesmaid!"

Millicent laughed and blushed, and Grandmamma Meredith patted her cheek encouragingly, as she wished her good-night, and said, "Make as good a wife as you have done a governess, my dear, and Mr. Graham will have no cause to complain."

Even stately Mrs. Meredith graciously congratulated her, and the dear child went to bed in a state of intense happiness to dream of a golden future.

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Lost on Christmas Eve

MARK HAZLITT'S STORY.

I HATED him, and he knew it well, for I made no secret of it. I used sometimes to think he was sorry, and then I enjoyed my triumph. But generally he made no sign, and his seeming indifference increased my hatred.

We had been friends in the old days. When we were young they called us Jonathan and David, and it might have gone on if he had been true.

There was that field at Fennie's Corner, he knew I wanted it, so he seized the chance fortune sent

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him and bought it from me. I found it hard to believe when they told me; but it was true. From that time we grew colder; it was a mean trick, and I could not forgive it. Still we kept up an appearance of friendship till his one crowning act of treachery came and separated us for ever.

I was out of the way, and the road was open. I had no right to say him nay, for she had given me no promise. But for all that she was mine! I had loved her all my life, and looked upon her as my wife. The neighbours laughed at each other when I asked how the old man was, and she—his daughter. The laugh stung me, though I never dreamt the truth.

I had been away six months, down in the south, and the devil can do plenty of work in six months.

I went up there that same night, and she met me as if we were friends—nothing more. I know I had never spoken to her of love, but she knew; they always do.

He was sitting in my old place by the fireside—sitting there as if he were at home. We shook hands, and the old man asked me many questions about my absence—why I had stayed away so long, and if the corn were as dear down there as here? I answered him, but watched her.

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Sometimes she listened to our talk, and laughed at her father's worn old jokes. Sometimes she was absorbed in counting the stitches on her needles. Sometimes she looked and smiled at *him*.

Every now and then they whispered low words which I could not hear. Still I did not suspect the truth.

He tried to stay me out, but I would not move, and at last he rose to go. She rose to take him to the door, but the old man said with his chuckling laugh: "It's too cold for you to go sweethearting at the door with that sore throat of yours, Hetty, you must just do it here for once."

She blazed up crimson, and glanced at me, half frightened. Andrew laughed. They went out into the passage, and I waited till she came in. Then I went to her.

"Have you been sweethearting with him?" I asked, as quietly as the rage at my heart would let me.

My tone deceived her. "Why not, if we both like?" she said, with a pretty, shy sauciness.

"Have you promised to be his wife?"

She began to be frightened then. I suppose my tone changed.

"Don't, Mark," she answered, trying to shake my

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hand off her arm. But I would not be shaken off.

"Have you promised to be his wife?" I said again, and she began to cry.

"You hurt me, Mark!"

I turned from her to the old man. "Are they to be man and wife?" I asked lightly.

"Yes, yes; you like him, don't you, Mark?" he said eagerly, with evident relief.

I don't remember what I said; I never could remember; but I went out into the cold night, and tried in vain to cool the fire within me.

From that time I avoided him and her. Before the spring came they were married, and the old man gave them the farm adjoining mine. The neighbours laughed and jeered whenever I went down the street, and called me a fool for trusting any girl.

I brought my own wife home a few months after, and then they ceased to laugh. She made me a good wife, but I never loved her. She wanted to be neighbourly, and call upon *them*,—Andrew and his wife,—but I forbade her ever even to speak their names to me.

I saw them sometimes—not often. A rise in the Long Acre field hid their farm from sight. I blessed that rise.

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I heard one day that they had a child—a son. I hated it.

I heard soon after that it was dead, and I was glad.

As time went on my own boy came; my little Davy. I had a gleam of happiness then, for I had always wanted a son of my own. He was a bright, happy little fellow, and made a wonderful difference in the old house. I used to sit and listen to his merry, babbling laugh, and feel younger—ay, and better, too.

His mother died. I felt it, for she had been good and true; but I did not trouble much. Things went on pretty much as usual, only I had the boy more with me. He was all I had, but I was not all he had; he loved me, and was never happier than when with me; but he had playfellows in the tame farm things—the dogs, and cats, and chickens; they all knew him.

When he was three years old *they* had another child—a girl. I heard the maids talking about it and saying what rejoicing there was over its birth.

But I knew they were disappointed that it was not a boy; I knew it, and exulted in my beautiful boy.

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For he was beautiful: every one said so, and I never tired of hearing it. As he grew older I took him out with me about the farm, and to the market town. Little Davy was well known in the market. The women used to catch him up and kiss him for very love of his bonnie face.

But I never let him go over the Long Acre field.

One day, when he was seven years old, he came running in, full of excitement.

"Father!" he cried, "there's such a pretty little girl down by the brook! She has no hat on."

I guessed at once who she was, and hurried out. She stood in the sunlight, with her hands and pinafore full of flowers and corn—*my* corn!

I went up to her and snatched it from her hands, and called her *thief*.

She did not know what I meant—how should she?—but she was frightened, and began to cry.

"Go home," I said, pushing her roughly on through the meadow grass. "If you come here again, I'll horsewhip you."

She ran away, sobbing as if her heart would break. I laughed as I pictured the father's fruitless wrath.

Davy came running out to meet me.

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"Where is she, father?" he asked, his face clouding with disappointment.

"Gone away, of course. Do you think I am going to have wicked little gipsy brats in my fields?"

"She didn't look wicked," said the child, standing on tiptoe to see as far as he could down the meadow.

I pushed him into the house, touching him for the first time with ungentle hand. He did not understand it, but took his place at the dinner table in silence.

After that I kept a strict look out, but *they* kept her out of the way. I hoped he would forget, but I might have known better.

He came in again, another day, at dinner-time, hot and breathless.

"Father! she was not a wicked gipsy brat! I've found out where she lives! She lives at the farm down over Long Acre, where you never will let me go. Her name is Hetty."

I told him, if ever he disobeyed me again and went anywhere near *their* home, I'd whip him within an inch of his life. At the brutal threat all the light went out of his blue eyes, and he shrank back scared. I hated myself then but did not alter my

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determination. If he disobeyed me I would lay my whip across his shoulders. He did not dare to disobey me.

About that time I sent him to school, first making sure *they* did not send their child to the same place. I found she went to a dame's school in another part of the village, so my boy was safe.

I, myself, had taught him to read, and he was quick and clever at his books. The master called to tell me that my son was the most promising of all his scholars, and that he was proud of him. I gave Davy a new half-crown that night.

One day I was driving through the village and saw my boy fighting with one a head taller than himself. There was a crowd of children round them, and seeing me they ran away; all except one little yellow-haired girl, who sat on the stump of a tree crying, with her hands over her face.

"Father," said Davy, his eyes flashing, "he threw a stone at a little girl and hit her, so I hit him!"

"Quite right, my boy," I said, with a throb of pride. "You would not be my son if you were a coward."

He looked at me doubtfully, hesitatingly. "Father, I ought to tell you—it's Hetty."

I felt my lips grow white. Taking the whip

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firmly in my hand I leaned over the side of the cart and laid it across his shoulders.

"Take that," I said, as it curled round him; "and that—and that."

He stood perfectly still, but a look of fear came into his face which haunted me. I drove away, leaving him standing there. He must have turned towards home at once, for as I drove round the curve I saw him going the near cut across the fields.

I did not speak to him all that dinner-time. He sat in his place, not daring to move. Once or twice I caught his eye, and saw that look of fear. I fancy he was watching me, but I did not often look in his direction.

For a week I watched his movements with brooding suspicion. I timed him to and from school, to see if he loitered on the way, and called on the master to find out if he were ever late. I think he knew that he was watched.

One day he came up to me as I stood in the barn, and said—

"Father, you need not trouble about it; I shall not speak to Hetty without telling you."

He was only a little fellow of eight years old, but there was a dignity in his words and tone which

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made me uncomfortable. I told him he was a good boy, and gave him a shilling to buy a toy. After that we were friends again.

The very next morning he told me that Hetty had joined his school. "But, father," he added, "she is on the girls' side, and we have nothing to do with the girls."

There was no other school, so I was forced to leave him there, and trust him.

She spoke to him, one morning, and asked him to play with her, but he told her I had forbidden him to speak to her, or go near her house. I heard that myself, as I leaned over the gate, hidden by the elders, and they came along the lane. They started, and looked frightened when they saw me, and I took my boy's hand and drew him to my side.

"Go home," I said to Hetty, "and tell your father and mother that I will not have my boy taught to trick and cheat!"

"Father, why mayn't I speak to Hetty?" asked the boy timidly, as we walked home.

"Because her father and mother once did me a wrong," I answered bitterly. "Because they wrecked my life's happiness, and deceived me, Davy, that is why."

"But what has Hetty done, father?"

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I roughly told him to go and play, and never mention her name to me again.

Soon after that I had a letter from Andrew, asking me to let bygones be bygones, and be friends once more. He spoke of the children—his girl and my boy—and said they would do each other good. I laughed the letter to scorn! *His* girl do *my* boy good, forsooth!

I sent them back the fragments of the letter; that was all the answer they got from me.

ANDREW LANGLEY'S STORY.

I WAS wrong. He was my friend, and I ought to have told him about Hetty; but after I bought that field he wanted he changed, and was never the same, and my pride was up. I did not know he really loved Hetty, though I often fancied he cared more for her than for any other girl. How could he help it? She was so pretty and lovable. I felt a good bit of triumph, too, in winning her over the heads of the rest; for there were several wanting her.

He threw up the friendship when he knew, and

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said things of Hetty and me that I couldn't forgive; hard, bitter, wicked things, and lies, too.

When our boy died he laughed, and told the neighbours it was God's judgment on us. He was glad, and *then* I first began to really hate him. Glad! because our little baby died. He was a hard man.

It almost broke Hetty's heart to lose her baby, and I thought she'd die, too; but after a while she picked up again.

Then we heard of little Davy. There was great rejoicing at the Hillside Farm when he came, and people said Mark was a different man. Hetty, womanlike, had a hankering after the child, and used to watch for it, when the girl carried it down to the village, and take it in her arms and kiss it. She said it reminded her of her own little dead baby.

It was a beautiful baby; even I was obliged to say so. But I could not bear to see it, for all that; and at last I told Hetty she was to leave the child alone, and wait till God gave her one of her own.

He never knew that we saw his boy; the girl was fond of Hetty, and never told him. I think his wife knew, for once or twice she smiled at Hetty

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coming out of church. She would have been friendly enough if he had let her.

Then our little Hetty came, and we were happy. I did not trouble my head about Mark, and we saw little of him or his boy. When we heard of his wife's death Hetty wanted to go and offer to look after Davy, but I wouldn't let her.

One day our little one came in crying and trembling with fear. Hetty could not quiet her, and she kept looking in a frightened way across the fields. We got it out of her at last. She had gone gathering flowers and "pitty corn," and had tried to get across some water to see the little boy; and a big man had come out with a whip and called her thief, and said he'd horsewhip her.

I knew it must be Mark, and cursed him in my wrath. I left the child sobbing in her mother's arms, and went out to brood upon revenge. He little knew how often after that I thwarted his favourite schemes and most cherished plans; for I had power in the neighbourhood. He set his heart on leasing the old water-mill and working it again; I told young Stephen that if he would apply to the squire at once I would be answerable for the rent. I went myself to advocate his cause, and won it, for the squire was in my debt for more than

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one long sum, and could not refuse me. Mark never knew. I sometimes wished he did.

But Hetty fretted sore. She did not like the bitter strife, and had tender woman's fancies.

"It is wrong to burden the innocent children with such a wicked feud," she said. "My baby shall learn to hate no one. I want her to grow up loving and loved. That dear little lad would make such a nice playmate for her, and they would do each other good. For her sake, Andrew, let it cease. It is such wearisome work to be at constant warfare, and it makes life hard. If only we could be at peace!"

I knew that she was right, and I listened to her gentle words till my own resolution gradually gave way.

One day he horsewhipped his boy in the village for defending little Hetty, and soon after that he sent her home with a message to us, that his boy should not be taught to trick and cheat.

My wife wept bitterly, and almost gave up hope of ever being at peace. She won me over to make one more effort. I had already spoken to him in the market, and he had refused to answer. We sent him a letter, asking him to forgive and forget.

That letter came back in fragments. Little Hetty asked us why she must not speak to Davy? why

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they might not play together? and we could not tell her. How could we speak of revenge and hatred to an innocent little child?

She used to nod at Davy in the school and street, and give him apples and cakes. He used to share his fruit with her, and bring her blackberries and nuts; but they did not speak.

Once they met in the lane, and little Hetty put up her face for a kiss. I saw them, and heard them laugh; but said nothing.

That night the little one sat on my knee and talked.

"Father, what makes people angry?"

"Sometimes one thing, sometimes another. I am angry when the men disobey me."

"What makes Davy's father angry?"

I looked at Hetty, and she answered:

"Because he thinks we were unkind to him once, dear, and he is afraid we shall be unkind to Davy too."

"Mayn't I tell him that we love Davy, mother?"

"No, dear; not yet."

It was always "Not yet."

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WHAT THE CHILDREN DID.

It was Christmas Eve. The ground was covered with a light fine snow, crisp and sparkling in the sunshine. Icicles hung from the cottage eaves and the boughs of the trees; and the distant hills stood out pure and white against the clear cold sky.

The village pond was frozen, and the boys skated on it merrily. All down the street long slides endangered the safety of the unwary walker, but gave unbounded pleasure to the happy little girls, and those boys not fortunate enough to possess skates.

First and foremost among the skaters was Davy Hazlitt. With his red comforter round his neck, and his hands in his pockets, he looked the picture of buoyant life, as he laughed and shouted with the rest.

On the bank stood Hetty in her scarlet cloak and hood, the prettiest little maiden in the village. She looked at Davy with wistful eyes, and nodded as he passed, and he laughed and nodded back. The villagers called them "little sweethearts," and Davy was proud of it.

"But it's funny sweethearts," he said, "never to speak."

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Presently Andrew Langley came down to the pond and put on his skates, and then seated little Hetty on the bank and put on hers. Tiny little things they were!

At first she clung to his hands, frightened and breathless; but she was a brave little maiden, and soon grew bold. It was a pretty sight, and many watched it with admiring eyes; the tall, brown man, and the little delicate, fragile girl, with her big brown eyes, and mass of silky, sunny hair.

The scarlet hood was a fitting frame to the sweet little face, and she laughed with glee when they called her "Little Red Riding Hood."

All the happy sunny morning they skated on the pond, and Andrew spoke often and kindly to the handsome little lad who was so often at his side.

And Davy looked shy and happy, but did not speak again. He wished his father would come and skate, and let him speak to Hetty, and help her to skate. Why wouldn't he?

His busy mind revolved many things as he ran home to dinner.

"Father, what is Christmas for?"

"You ought to know that at your age, Davy," replied Mark Hazlitt.

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"Oh, I know about Christ's birthday. But what is the good of it now?"

"What is the good of keeping any birthday?"

"Yes, but Mr. Amos says we ought to be especially glad for Christmas because—and that's what I forget. Because what?"

Mark was silent, and Davy wondered.

"It was something about an angel's song," he said at last. "I'll get my Bible."

He jumped down and seized his little school Testament, turning the leaves rapidly.

"Here it is. Oh, I remember now, of course! It's peace and good-will, father. What is good-will?"

"A kindly, neighbourly feeling."

"Mr. Amos said God was always using Christmas Day; it is one of His instruments. Lots of people learn something about God from Christmas Day. Do you think they do?"

"Very likely."

"He said Christmas Day speaks and teaches lessons of good-will. Fancy a day speaking! Isn't it funny, father?"

"Very."

"Do you think Christmas Day will speak to us,

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father? Oh, I do hope it will! I wonder how it can, though. What will it say, do you think?"

"Tell you to be a good boy, most likely."

"And you—will it tell you to be a good man? But you are a good man, aren't you, father?"

"Go on with your dinner."

Davy was silent. After dinner his father called him back as he was leaving the room.

"Would you like to take a Christmas box to old Dean, Davy?"

"Oh yes, father!" was the eager reply.

"Then tell Bridget to put up a basket of mince pies, and cakes, and things—some beef, too. Here is half-a-crown for him."

Davy seized it and ran out with a shout. Half an hour later his father saw him racing down the road with his basket on his arm.

Old Dean lived in a cottage on the moor, nearly two miles away from the Hillside Farm. Davy ran nearly all the way there, and gave up his basket to the old man's niece.

"There's pies, and cakes, and meat, and sugar, and snuff, and tea, and—and—I forget the rest," he said, breathless. "It's going to snow again, Sallie."

"That it is, and you'd best be quick home, Master Davy," replied the woman, rubbing his little cold

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hands. "It's going to be a nasty night, my dear."

"Jolly!" cried the boy. "I'll make a snow house to-morrow! You come and see, Sallie, if you come to church."

"There'll be no church for me to-morrow, my dear. I shall hear the bells, and that's all."

"Well, good-bye, Sallie; a merry Christmas. Good-bye, Dean; eat all the snuff—I mean the meat. A jolly Christmas to you, Dean!"

"Thank you kindly, Master Davy," said the old man, brightening up under the influence of the joyous young life.

Sallie stood at the door and watched him out of sight; he galloped down the little incline, turning once to wave his hand, and then sped on to the moor, and that was all she could tell when they came to ask her.

There was a beaten track across the moor, and Davy dashed along with a song and a shout. Snowflakes were already beginning to fall softly, and he saw that the sky was full of them. Within half a mile of the Hillside Farm was a cottage, and he stopped and looked in.

"A merry Christmas, Mrs. White!"

"Thank you, Master Davy. See what little Miss Hetty has just brought me."

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Davy looked at the heap of good things.

"She takes care of you, and I take care of old Dean, don't we? How long has she gone?"

"Not twenty minutes—or it may be a trifle more; you'll soon see her at your rate, Master Davy."

He bounded off, and looked down the track; but there was no Hetty. The snow on either side the track lay smooth and crisp, and on it he saw the impress of little dancing feet.

"It's Hetty!" he said, after a moment's critical survey. "Just like a girl to like to see her own footmarks! I'll follow." Suddenly he stopped, for the little prints took a curve and went off into the moor.

"What's that for?" he said, aloud. "Where's she gone to?"

He looked on as far as he could see, but could detect no returning footprints. The snow was coming down faster still.

"I'll go after her, anyhow," he thought, looking up to the darkening sky. "It's going to be a storm. I wonder how far she's gone."

He ran on, following the little footprints in the snow. The moor was not flat, but full of little hills and vales just there, and he could see but a little way ahead.

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Presently the little footprints turned again, taking an abrupt curve, and then they went round a hillock and back towards the open moor.

"What's that for?" again said Davy, in his astonishment.

On went the little marks; now down the valley, now up the hill, now along the stretch of moorland, and Davy followed. Suddenly the storm came on, and the snowflakes fell thick, and large, and fast.

"I must go back!" faltered Davy, standing still. "I'll call her once more."

He shouted at the top of his clear young voice, and listened. A faint sound, like that of a crying child, fell upon his ear. Again he shouted, "Hetty! little Hetty!" and again came the faint sound of the childish wail.

Careless of snow or darkness he bounded forward, shouting hopefully, "Don't cry, Hetty; I'm coming, I'm coming!"

Then he saw the glimmer of scarlet through the blinding snow, and in another moment his arms were round the little sobbing child.

"Oh, Davy, Davy! I'm lost! Take me home to mother!" she wailed. "I want to go home!"

"Then run," said Davy, encouragingly. "Take my hand, Hetty, and we'll soon be there."

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He turned, as he thought, in the direction he had come, and they ran on bravely for a little while. The persistent snow fell faster still, blinding their eyes, and filling up the footprints which might have been a guide.

"Are we nearly there?" asked Hetty, clinging closer to him.

"Nearly there," he echoed cheerily. "Don't be frightened, Hetty."

On in the bewildering storm they wandered, still thinking that each step led them nearer home. The little lad kept up bravely, choking back the sob that now and then would rise; for he thought that only girls should cry.

But the darkness deepened, and the soft snow rose around their weary feet, when at last Davy knew that they were lost. He stood still and tried to look beyond into the gathering gloom; but he could see nothing but the shadowy outlines of some scattered trees through the falling snow.

"If we could only get somewhere out of the snow till father came to find us!" he said, trying his hardest not to feel afraid. "I wonder when father will come!"

"Shall we soon be home now?" said Hetty, in a little quivering voice.

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"I 'spect, Hetty, we'd best shout a bit, and then perhaps some one will hear us, and come and carry you," said the brave little lad cheerily. "Let us shout our loudest."

They shouted, but no answer came. Again and again the cry went out on the thick air: "Father, father!"

Then they stumbled on, now up to their knees in a snow-drift, now high on the rising ground. At last little Hetty could go no further, and dropped, sobbing with exhaustion and fright, on a sloping bank. Davy looked round despairingly. They seemed to be in a valley, for dark, shadowy-looking objects loomed high on either side. It was almost dark, and somehow Davy never did quite like the dark, even at home, and it was worse out there.

"We shall be all snowed over to death!" sobbed Hetty.

"Let us try and get out of the snow, dear," said Davy, protectingly, as became his years. "I think we can if we try, Hetty."

He was looking at the dark objects around them, and wondering if they were rocks, and if he could find a little sheltered nook in which they could nestle till father came.

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He knew well there were such nooks among the wildness of the moorland hills.

Half carrying the tired child he staggered into the shadow, and set her down against a huge boulder.

"Now, Hetty, you sit there till I come back. I won't go far; only round the corner.

He went round, and climbing a steep incline found himself in a little cave, sheltered from snow and wind. There was just light enough to see that one corner was dry, while the other was wet and muddy.

"It is better than the snow," said Davy, with a sinking heart. "Anyhow, father will soon be here."

With this thought to cheer him, and he had perfect faith in it, he went back to little Hetty and took her to the cave. They nestled in each other's arms, drawing closely round them the folds of Hetty's scarlet cloak.

"Don't cry, dear," said Davy, soothingly. "Go to sleep. I'll take care of you till father comes."

The night grew darker. All over the face of the earth lay the thick soft snow, and yet faster still fell the silent flakes.

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THE MEETING BY MIDNIGHT.

HETTY LANGLEY had finished her work, and stood at the doorway watching her husband as he drove up the lane.

"Where's the little one?" he asked, as he threw the reins to a man and jumped down.

"I sent her with a basket of good things to Mrs. White, on purpose to get her out of the way. What have you brought her, Andrew?"

"Ah! it looks as if I'd brought something, doesn't it?" he said, laughing merrily, and placing a huge parcel in her arms. "There's enough to cover the tree well."

"A doll, Andrew?"

"Yes."

"A Noah's Ark?"

"Yes."

"And what is this box? Oh, come and unpack them, Andrew! I'm as impatient as the child herself."

The father and mother went into the front parlour where the Christmas tree stood waiting for its Christmas fruit. Locking the door for fear the little one might return before the work was finished, they

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opened the parcel, disclosing toys enough to gladden any little maiden's heart. Hetty clapped her hands with glee.

"You are as bad as the child!" said Andrew, with pretended reproof.

"And you are worse!" she retorted. "I should like to know who took those animals out of the Ark; *I* did not! Wouldn't be so childish!"

Andrew laughed. "I was only looking for Mrs. Noah."

"Mrs. Nonsense! you wanted to play! Don't try to get out of it, Sir! Now come and help me to fix the things."

The pleasant work progressed fast, and at last the final touch was given. Hetty stood back to take in the general effect.

"It is pretty! Oh, Andrew, if only that poor little lad might come and share it with her!"

Andrew made no reply, but walked to the window and looked out.

"It is snowing fast, Hetty; the child isn't out, is she?"

"I told her to stay at the cottage if it came on to snow, and I'd send Paul for her. I'll go and see if he has gone."

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She went out and called Paul. One of the farm men answered:

"He's just gone to the cottage for Miss Hetty."

"Oh, that's right, I was going to send him. It's going to be a wild night, Blake."

"Yes'm, a reg'lar old-fashioned Christmas Eve."

Without further anxiety Hetty went in, and opened her oven door. Andrew and the child were to have their favourite hot cakes for tea that night. Presently Paul came in, with a huge log for the fire.

"Where's Miss Hetty, Paul?" asked his mistress.

He looked startled. "I clean forgot her, Ma'am. I'll go now."

"Do," said Hetty, looking disturbed. "You must carry her, Paul, and take an umbrella and this shawl." She took down a warm check shawl and put on his arm, and he went out. Presently Andrew came in, shaking the snow from his hat. It was rapidly getting dark, and he poked the fire into a blaze.

"Where's the little one?"

"Paul has just gone for her."

There was silence for a few minutes, and then Andrew spoke, as if thinking aloud, "He wouldn't let the boy come if we asked him."

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"No," said Hetty sorrowfully. "But I'd like to have peace and good-will to-morrow, Andrew."

"Ay, it's easy to talk."

"Wouldn't you be friends now if he would, Andrew?"

"I don't know."

"Oh, Andrew! and it's God's own peace-making time!"

"I know," he said impatiently.

Hetty glanced up and sighed. It was nearly tea-time, and she began to set the table. Outside a few adventurous village children were singing carols, and she took them out some cakes. The snow was coming down, fast and thick, and she stopped to look down the lane; but Paul was not in sight.

"He hasn't had time yet," she said, as she went in. "The little one is heavy to carry."

The farm kitchen looked bright, and warm, and cheerful. A pile of hot cakes were waiting to be buttered, and the kettle sang away merrily.

"She'll be here by the time tea's ready," she thought, glancing at the clock. "I wish Andrew had gone himself." She could not divest herself of a vague feeling of alarm, and watched the clock anxiously. At last she heard Paul's steps, and hurried to the door.

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"Where's the child, Paul?"

"Isn't she here, Ma'am?" replied the man, startled. "She came home long afore the snow came on. Mrs. White wouldn't let her bide a minute there."

Hetty caught at the doorpost. "Oh, my child! my child! Andrew!"

He was at her side in a moment, and upheld her with his arm. "What is it? The child lost? Nonsense! She can't be lost!"

"I felt something was going to happen!" wailed the mother. "I *felt* it, Andrew. She is lost on the moor in this storm! Oh, my little lamb!"

Her husband took her in, and taking his lantern went out. Most of the men were gone; he summoned the remainder, and told them what to do. As he stood directing them a boy came running into the yard; one of Mark Hazlitt's boys.

"Is Master Davy here?" he asked eagerly, breathless with the speed of his running. "Jim has been down to Dean's after him, and Mrs. White, at the Moor Cottage, told him he'd gone after Miss Hetty. Is he here?"

"Miss Hetty hasn't come home either," answered one of the men. "We are going to look for her," he added in a low tone, glancing at his master.

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"It's a bad night to be out on the moor. Go back quick, Ted, and tell your master."

The boy flew off, and the men, with their lanterns lighted, turned in various directions. Andrew went back to the house.

"Hetty," he said, "*his* boy is lost, too; they say he is with the little one. Good-bye, my dear; keep up; we will bring them back." He spoke cheerfully, but his heart was heavy with dread. It was such a fearful night for the children to be on the moor.

The news soon spread through the village, and the men left their warm firesides to join the search.

There was no sign to guide them; the falling snow had long since covered up the little roving footmarks. Even the women turned out, and explored the near borders of the moor, and the fields around the village, but could find no trace of the lost children.

With a stern, set face, Mark Hazlitt gave sharp, decisive orders to his men, and then went out on the bleak moor. *They* went in twos, but he was alone. It was no easy thing to strike out any certain course in that blinding snow; at best the search must be a wandering one.

The storm grew wilder and the night darker.

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The lanterns shed but a faint light, and the searchers grew weary and doubtful of success. How could the children live in such a storm ?

But though some lost heart and courage, others grew more and more determined. "Master, we'll find her afore we turn," said one resolutely, and Andrew clasped his hand in silence. He knew that he could trust them ; they loved the child.

It was heart-wearying work to wade through the deep soft snow, throwing the light of the lantern from side to side. Now starting with sickening dread at the sight of a fragment of something dark sticking out of a mass of white ; what might that mass be ? Now plunging a stick deep into a drift, with a fear of what lay below.

At eleven o'clock the storm ceased. Calm, and peaceful, and still lay the white-robed earth beneath the solemn sky. Down in the village anxious hearts were keeping watch, and lights were gleaming in every cottage window. The children lay awake in their little beds, whispering in hushed tones of their lost playmates, and listening eagerly to their elders' talk. Some of the women went up to the farm to watch and wait with the waiter there. Hetty waved them all aside, and with an awful fear pressing upon her heart paced up and down the dreary lane. She

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could not stay in the warm, bright room while her little one was out in the cold, cruel snow!

Far and wide the lanterns gleamed through the darkness, and the searchers called eagerly one to the other; but the answer was still the same: "Not found yet!"

Mark Hazlitt heard them calling, not only his boy, but Andrew's girl: "Master Davy! Davy! Hetty!"

What was the feud to them?

He found himself at last near the old Clan rocks, and the sound of voices had died away. He was alone in the terrible silence and solitude, with the mysterious, shadowy-looking rocks rising around him. For the first time the strong man shivered with a nameless dread. His little lad, where was he?

A dark, shapeless mass lying at the foot of a rock caused his heart to stand still, and then throb with an overwhelming fear.

Was it Davy?

He stood beside it, not daring to stoop and make his fear a fact. The perspiration broke out on his forehead, and his trembling hand refused to hold the lantern. It fell, and the light went out.

With a fearful effort he stooped, and touched the mass. "Davy!" he whispered hoarsely, "Davy!"

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There was no answer, and with desperation he knelt and sought the face of his boy. It was only a dead dog, which had crawled into the shelter to die.

He rose, and tried to shake off the fear which was crushing every hope. Suddenly a sound broke the silence, and he listened eagerly.

"Hetty! little Hetty! Father's here! Davy! Davy boy!"

Nearer and nearer came the strong clear voice, and the next minute the two men stood face to face. Andrew was the first to break the silence.

"Mark, it is Christmas; we are looking for what may be our little dead children. Will you forgive and forget?"

He held out his hand with a sudden longing for the grasp of his old friend in the terrible sorrow which was shadowing both. But Mark stood motionless.

"Is the past to be forgotten in a moment?" he said coldly. "Can wrongs be undone by a few meaningless words? Go your own way, and let me go mine. The past can never be forgotten."

He turned from the offered hand, and plunged into the drifted snow. Andrew stood still. Clear through the still night came the sound of the ringing bells. It was Christmas morning.

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FOUND ON CHRISTMAS DAY.

CLASPED in each other's arms the children slept, and as they slept they dreamt. Davy thought that he was lying in his little bed at home, waiting for Christmas Day. It was dark, but as he watched he saw a light shine through the window, and presently an old man opened the sash and stepped in. He had on a long cloak covered with snow, and icicles hung from his long, grey locks. "I am Christmas Day," he said, nodding to Davy. "You want to say something to me; what is it?"

"No," said Davy, jumping up in a hurry. "I want you to say something to me! You always do say things, you know. Mr. Amos said so. Say something to me."

The old man looked at him with a gentle smile, and stretched out his hand and laid it on the boy's fair head.

"'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and good-will,'" he said solemnly, and as he spoke his face changed, and Davy saw that it was like the face of the Saviour as it was in the little picture over his bed. And then came the chimes of the Christmas bells, and he awoke and started up. It

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was all dark, and very cold, and as he stretched out his hand it fell upon the cold snow. But the bells *were* ringing merrily, and as he listened he heard something else.

"Little Hetty! My little Hetty!" rang out the strong voice, and Davy's heart gave a jump.

"Hetty! Hetty! wake!" he cried; "here's your father. Here she is, Mr. Langley! Here she is, and me, too!" And then the little fellow burst into tears, and the next thing he knew was that he was in his own father's arms, and a voice he scarcely knew was sobbing, "My boy! my boy!"

Holding his boy closely to his heart, Mark shouted in a voice thrilling and trembling with his weight of joy,—

"Andrew, Andrew! Found!"

"Found?" echoed Andrew, with a sudden pause, and a strange choking sensation. "But how?" He swung himself down the rocks, and into the hollow, guided by the repeated cry. There she stood with one arm outstretched for "father," and the other round the neck of the man who had vowed eternal enmity to him and his. With one great quivering sob he knelt down and laid his cold face against the little white cheek.

"My God, my God! I thank Thee!" burst

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from his trembling lips, and then the strong man broke down, and cried like a little child.

"Father," said Davy gladly, "aren't you glad Hetty's father shouted? You'd have gone right past if he hadn't, and then we should have been frozen to death."

Once more the two men stood face to face on the dreary moor, and now Mark was the first to speak.

"You found my boy, Andrew. God bless you for it! Let bygones be bygones." His voice gave way, and he bowed his face on Davy's curly head.

One after the other the scattered searchers caught the welcome sound, and far and near the words re-echoed over the quiet snow—"Found! Found! A merry Christmas!"

WHAT THE FAIRIES DID.

WHAT did they do? Why, they flew up to the sky and pulled the clouds from before the great round sun, and then flew down again to see how he made the snow sparkle and gleam. They kissed the little girls' cheeks till they were red as a rose, and whispered such merry thoughts to the little boys that they shouted with glee. They peeped in old

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Dean's window, and threw a glittering sunbeam on his bed to wish him "Merry Christmas." They stamped on the ice to make sure it was hard and safe for the laddies and lassies, and brushed the snow away from the slides, and whispered to the robins where the crumbs were lying ready for them.

How could the pudding boil without the fairies? They poked up the fire, and sent the sparks flying up the chimney. They woke all the children in the village, and hurried them out of bed to look at their stockings. They flew to the church, and whispered to the good old rector that he was to preach only a short sermon full of Christmas love and good-will.

At the Hillside Farm they watched beside little sleeping Davy, and whispered strange thoughts to Mark Hazlitt.

"God has been good to you," they said; "be good to others. Peace and good-will, Mark! Peace and good-will. It is Christmas Day."

And Mark listened to the fairies. "You saved my boy," he said to Andrew.

"You found my girl," said Andrew; and looking into each other's eyes they saw something that brought back the remembrance of other days, and they clasped hands on the threshold of the Hillside Farm. The fairies laughed and danced among

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little Hetty's curls, and shook the toys on the Christmas tree, and shouted "Merry Christmas" so loudly that everybody thought the wind was rising. And then they flew to the old church tower and sat on the bells and made them sing, and this is what the bells sang :—

"Ding-dong! it is Christmas Day!"
Merrily, merrily chimed the glad bells!
Over the moorland, and over the hill,
Chiming of happiness, peace, and good-will.
Over the valley, and down the dells,
Merrily, merrily, chimed the glad bells.
"Ding-dong! it is Christmas Day!"
The earth gleams white in the sun's bright ray,
White and pure in the morning light,
After the darkness and storm of the night!

"Ding-dong! The children are found!"
Cheerily, cheerily chimed the glad bells.
"Lost in the snow-storm! found in the dawning!
Found in the dawning of Christ's own glad morning!"
Over the moorland, and down in the dells,
Cheerily, cheerily chimed the glad bells.
"Ding-dong! The children are found!"
Who could e'er tire of the bells' sweet sound?
Chiming so readily, chiming so cheerily,
Chiming the glad news so loudly and merrily!

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How to have a Happy Christmas.

It is a curious thing that so many people expect as a right to be happy at Christmas time. They look forward to it as a holiday from work, a time for plum puddings, beef, geese, Christmas stories, presents, and general hilarity. It has always been so; and they see no reason why old custom should fail.

The children have their Christmas tree, and grow wild over Santa Claus. Presents are bought or made beforehand, and the air is delightfully full of secrets. The rooms are decorated with holly, evergreens, and perhaps mistletoe, and everybody smiles at everybody, without any very definite idea as to what they are smiling about.

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Now all this is very pleasant indeed, and exactly the state of things that should exist at Christmas time. The rooms ought to be decorated with holly —beautiful red-berried Christmas holly! Presents ought to be made or bought. Santa Claus should be a guest wherever there are children to welcome him; secrets should abound, and it is everybody's duty to smile at everybody, even when they do not precisely know why.

I believe in Christmas. It ought to be a happy time for old, and young, and middle-aged.

And yet there are people who won't be happy, and, worse still, won't let any one else be happy. Very disagreeable people they are. I hope you don't know any of them. I do. There ought to be a large asylum built especially for people who *will not* be happy at Christmas time.

But I am not going to talk about them; they are not worth one paragraph at Christmas time. Black Monday must do for them.

I want to speak now about a very large class, who, strange to say, do not know how to be happy.

They would be if they could, but they don't know how.

There are a great many of these people in the world, and they belong to all classes of society.

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Shall I tell you what they do? They order in as many good things for Christmas fare as their circumstances will allow, and when the time comes they eat them. That is what they do.

"And a very nice thing to do, too," some of you exclaim. So it is; but happiness does not depend entirely upon Christmas fare. You may eat roast turkey and grumble all the while.

How to be happy! If my recipe proves successful, you will owe me a heavy debt. Ever since the world began people have been searching after happiness—the world of people I mean, of course. There are happy people in the world—plenty of them; but there might be a great many more. The fact is, the anti-Christmas spirits are much too numerous and strong; they ought to be put down.

"What are the anti-Christmas spirits?" I thought some one would ask me that question. I will tell you, and then if they come to your home you will know them, and can drive them away. Don't let them come in; send them away at once; they are the greatest enemies old Father Christmas has to contend with.

There is Selfishness; if once you let him enter, good-bye to happiness. He will get all the nicest things for himself; the warmest and most com-

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fortable seat; the largest slice of cake or pudding; the prettiest things on the Christmas tree. Never was there a worse guest!

Then there is Bad Temper, who scolds everybody, and finds fault with everything, and makes the home miserable. I would rather invite a Polar bear to dine with me than such a spirit; you could keep the bear chained up, and if you gave him enough to eat he would be quiet enough. But Bad Temper cannot be chained.

There are plenty more of these spirits. Envy, Uncharitableness, Hatred, Malice. Don't ask me to tell you, you know them; and I do not want to talk about them. But I do want you to have a happy Christmas.

First of all, the secrets! No Christmas ought to come and go without secrets. Of course they must be nice ones—pleasant ones, and certainly not such things as practical jokes and unkind surprises.

Every one should have a secret; from father and mother to the youngest child—always excepting the baby. I never yet met any one who did not like a pleasant secret. Some of my little friends will be good a whole day if I promise to tell them a secret at night.

Christmas secrets must relate to presents and

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pleasant surprises. Some of my little readers will smile at this. Wait a bit; I shall have something to say to you presently. I am going to speak to the head of the household first.

To you, Sir. You would like to have a happy Christmas of course, and you would like the mother and the children to be happy. *Cela va sans dire*, as our French neighbours say, which means, "That goes without telling." Every man wishes to be happy.

But has it ever struck you that it rests very much with you whether Christmas be a happy day or not? Perhaps you are well off, and can afford to buy a load of Christmas presents, and, having done this, think you have done your earthly duty. No such thing. There is more for you to do than that. Neither wife nor child will be quite happy with their presents unless you give yourself with them. Stay at home for once; gather the bairns round you in the evening; tell them stories of when father was a boy; make them laugh. Tell them why you married their mother: because she was the best, and prettiest, and sweetest girl in all the world. They will believe it, and love her all the more, and she will love you all the more for saying it. Just try it, and when you see the big eyes wide open,

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and the little faces full of happiness and faith in "father," you will feel quite repaid for the effort, if effort it be, and will agree with me that father himself is better than presents alone.

But suppose you are poor, and shake your head when the children tease for a "Christmas Box"—that box so dear to every childish heart—you cannot afford such things; it is as much as you can do to find bread and cheese for so many mouths. You wish you could put something in those little socks. Oh yes; but you cannot; you are only a poor man. Let us talk about it. Suppose Christmas Day comes on Tuesday this year. On the previous Saturday you receive your wages. You are not a drinking man; that is to say, you seldom, if ever, take too much; but you do like to spend a sociable hour with a friend on Saturday night after the week's work. You think you have fairly earned it. Now, suppose from now to Christmas you exercise a little self-denial, and go without your glass. Suppose you put the money on one side, and tell your wife and children that you have a secret which they shall know on Christmas Day. The excitement will be more than you bargain for. Try it.

It may be only a shilling or two that you save. Never mind; make the most of them. Buy a pretty

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ribbon for your pale, hard-working wife, and don't be content with giving it to her, make her put it on. Tell her you would give her more if you could; tell her she is worthy the best the shops can show, and she will be satisfied and happy. Buy a penny toy for each of the children, or, better still, *make* some toys if you can. If you are a mechanic, exercise your ingenuity, and see what you can do. Is it impossible to knock together a tiny wooden crib for little Dottie's doll? Cannot you make a whip for Willie, and a whistle for Tom? Make a useful box from odd bits of wood, paint it, and make it fasten well; it will be a treasure to your eldest girl. Cut a little boat for wee Wattie; he will spend many an hour floating it in a pail of water. Paint it red, and get the mother to give you a scrap of calico for a sail. If you are clever, there are many such things you can make. Where there's a will there's a way. Spend sixpence in chestnuts, and on Christmas morning take the children for a walk while your wife gets the dinner. After tea, tell them the time has come for divulging the secret, and then in some pleasant way bring in your little gifts. It would be a good plan to take your eldest boy into your confidence, and make him go out and knock at the door, and deliver the presents one by

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one, with the owners' names written on them. Anything that partakes of mystery will find favour with the bairns. Then gather round the fire and roast your chestnuts. Do you remember the time when you were a boy and roasted chestnuts? If so, tell your own boys and girls all about it. I dare say you will enjoy it as much as they. Old boys are not so very different from young boys after all.

Now I am coming to the mothers. Make up your minds that "father" and "the children" shall have a really good, happy time for once in a year. Put away all fretfulness, and smooth all the wrinkles from your forehead. Never mind the servants; if they are troublesome forgive them, because it is Christmas Day. Come downstairs with a smile on your face and in your heart. Tell the children it is to be a happy day for them, and there are to be as few "don'ts" as are compatible with the general welfare and comfort. Let them decorate the room and make it as pretty as possible. Don't tell them the holly-berries drop about and spoil the carpet, and that nails spoil the walls, and therefore they shall not decorate. I will tell you something better than that. Let them make long festoons of the evergreens, and loop them over the pictures; a little fine string will tie them nicely to already existing nails.

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Half the fun of Christmas is the decorating. My brothers, and sisters, and I used to sit up late on Christmas Eve to finish the room for the next morning. That was one of our secrets, and no one dreamed of looking in to see what was going on. We made the room a perfect bower; fit for Santa Claus himself. So if you can trust the children—*and do not say you cannot if you have not tried*—let them make wreaths and festoons, and encourage them to make much of Christmas Day; for Christmas comes but once a year. Remember that on "mother" depends everything, or nearly so. You are the centre round which these little systems revolve. Be true to your motherhood; don't scold anybody. When your husband comes with his gift of love and Christmas greeting, let him see nothing in your face but smiling love. Let the children think "how pretty mother looks," for gentle looks and smiles are the children's beauty after all; they know nothing of classical features and regular outlines. A loving, gentle mother is always beautiful in her children's eyes. At any rate, be beautiful on Christmas Day; only beware of getting a taste for admiration; it may lead you to being beautiful all the year round! If you can afford presents, give them by all means, be they ever so small. Make a

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rag doll for Dottie's cot, and a rag ball for Nell. Above all, try and get something for "*father.*" Save up your odd coppers; buy calico, and make him a shirt; let the elder girls help. If you can buy more expensive things, do so; only let Christmas Day stand right out by itself, the happiest day in all the year!

So much for the elders. I have not begun to speak to the children yet, and when I do begin, there is no knowing when I shall leave off! I think I had better leave it for a time. Meanwhile, the fathers and mothers can revolve in their own minds what I have been saying to them. I shall have a few more words for them before I have done.

* * * * *

Now for the children. Here is Christmas, close at hand, and if you intend to have a happy day, you had better begin at once to prepare.

In the first place, you must make up your minds that happiness will not come to you unless you try to bring it to others. Does that sound queer? It is the truth; you never yet knew a selfish child, boy or girl, who was happy. The happiest people in the world are those who do most for others.

Now there are a great many ways in which a child

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may bring happiness to others, especially at Christmas time. First of all, comes your own home—father, mother, brothers, and sisters. What can you do to please father? Can you work him a pair of slippers? No. Then can you hem a handkerchief nicely, or help mother with a shirt? I do not know what you can do; you must think and find out. Father and mother will not like Christmas half so well if they have nothing from their boys and girls. If you cannot give presents, you can give love and obedience. Don't shrug your shoulders and frown. Santa Claus will not be pleased with you if you do.

Now there are different sorts of children, just as there are different sorts of fruit. Do you know a happy, rosy, laughing, sweet-tempered little boy or girl who puts you in mind of a sweet little winter apple? I do. Do you know a sullen, selfish, quarrelsome child, who puts you in mind of a sour crab? I do. Do you know a boy who is never still, always popping about like a roasting chestnut? And a girl who is too lazy to work, too idle to be of any use, and is of no more good in the world than a horse chestnut? I wonder how many sweet red cherries, and mellow pears, and rare ripe grapes there are among my little readers; and how many

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crabs, and sour cranberries, and sloes? Well, I will not inquire too particularly, but will try and imagine that there are none but really good fruit, only some of it not quite ripe perhaps. I do not like sloes and crabs myself.

Some of my little readers are already dreaming of Christmas Day and all its pleasures. They have made up their minds "to be good to everybody!" and have already settled what they are going to give in the way of presents. Mother knows that on Christmas Day she will not be left to do all the work by herself; her little daughter is looking forward to "helping to get dinner," and Tom is trying hard for a prize at school, "just to please father." The boys have hunted the country over for holly, and have hoarded up their pocket money for weeks to buy something nice for mother. The girls are always on the *qui vive*, hurrying suspicious-looking little scraps of silk and wool out of sight at the sound of disturbing footsteps.

I have not very much to say to you, you dear little things. You deserve a merry Christmas, and I hope you will have one. If I were Santa Claus, I would take good care that your socks were well filled, right up to the top, running over. Children who make up their minds to "be good to everybody,"

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will very likely find that "everybody" will be good to them.

But what about the children who do not think it worth while to "do anything for anybody"? There are a pretty good number of them in the world. I wish there were not. They are not very nice children, and my old friend Santa Claus is not at all fond of them, and would never go near them if he had his own way. But Father Christmas is very forgiving and kind, and says, "Try them this once, Mr. Santa Claus, and perhaps they will be better next year." I wonder whether they will. I know some of them, and am waiting to see what they will do this Christmas. It is just possible that some gentle good spirit has been at work, putting all sorts of kind, loving thoughts into their hearts. They are making up their minds to try and be like the children in that book of books for the bairns, *Ministering Children*. They think it must be pleasant to help other people, who are poor and helpless, and they are wondering if they can be like Rose, or Ruth, or little Jane. Of course you can. Begin at once. Look around you, and see what you can do. As I said just now, home comes first; make sure of a happy Christmas in your own home, and then go on. A little girl who works hard to make

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something nice for a poor woman down the street, but comes down on Christmas morning without one tiny token of love for mother and father, brother and sister, will feel dissatisfied and unhappy. Let me whisper why, dear. It is because charity begins at home. Do all you can for the dear ones there, and then help the old woman; you can do both, remember. Shall I tell you what a little friend of mine once did? She saved up her pennies for many weeks before Christmas, and spent them all in buying tea and sugar for a poor old woman in the work-house. "What a kind little girl!" you say. Wait a bit. When she came down on Christmas Day she found her plate covered with pretty presents from her own family. Her sisters had knitted her some cuffs, and made her a tiny pin-cushion for her dressing-table. Tom had made her the prettiest little shell box that she had ever seen. There was something from everybody, but they had nothing from her. It made her so unhappy that she actually had a good cry. What a pity she did not think in time that her mother and sisters would like a little present from her too! She would have been much happier all the day. Christmas Day is very often what we make it.

Take my advice: put all the common days of the

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year on one side, make up your mind that you will be happy, and that everybody else shall be happy too. Promise faithfully not to do one unkind thing, nor say one unkind word. Have as many secrets as you possibly can; the more the merrier. Do this, and I think you will have a happy Christmas Day. Don't quarrel with one another; give way. Don't tease the little ones and make them cry. Don't worry your parents, or annoy the servants. Have all sorts of games—blind-man's-buff, turn the trencher, forfeits, old soldier! Hang the mistletoe over the doorway, and pluck little bits of it if you like. Father Christmas will only laugh. Learn wonderful conjuring tricks to astonish everybody, sing your prettiest songs, wear your prettiest frocks and sashes, and your best ties and collars. Let Christmas be a festival. Stir up the fire and make a blaze, laugh, and dance, and play to your heart's content, and when you kneel down at night give one little glad thanksgiving psalm of a prayer for a happy Christmas.

Now I am going to say a few words to everybody: fathers, mothers, children; old and young; rich and poor.

While you are preparing for your own happy Christmas, remember those whose firesides will be

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lonely and desolate; whose cupboards will be bare; whose homes will be cold and dreary.

While you stir round the Christmas puddings, think of that little room where the poor over worked seamstress is coughing her life away; of the toiling poor, who work early and late for the crust of bread; of the aged widow in yonder cot. Think of the countless homes of poverty and sore distress; of the little hungry children, and patient, half-starved women.

Ah! you know little of the want and woe of this happy Christmas time! Secure in your own bright homes, you fail to realize that even now "the poor ye have always with you;" that even now little children and old grey-haired men and women and sad-eyed mothers are asking for bread to keep them alive. It is so, and it is for you to give it.

A happy Christmas! You may prepare the Christmas dinner, and buy the costly presents; you may insure for yourself ease, and comfort, and pleasure; but without one thing, the day will be a failure. That one thing is a consciousness of having done all you can to lift the load of suffering from your less happily favoured neighbour. Is he in want of the necessaries of life? Give him of your abundance. Is he lonely and sorrowful? Give him friendship and sympathy.

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What? You give an annual subscription to more than one charitable fund? Very good; but this year do more. Be your own almoner; *give to your neighbour*, to your suffering townsmen and women. Your roast beef will be all the better for the slices which go to the widow and fatherless. Your oranges and nuts will taste the nicer if shared by those little neglected children who know nothing of a parent's care. The children will enjoy their games far more if they are allowed to ask the little lonely schoolmate to join them. There are a thousand and one ways of making Christmas Day happy. One has more money than he knows what to do with. I wonder if he has a niece or nephew upon whom the burden of life has fallen heavily? I dare say he has, and a five-pound note would make their hearts very glad. Will he send it, do you think? I wish he would, or, rather, take it. I fancy he would not wait till next Christmas for an opportunity for sending another.

That elderly lady with the handsome lace on her cap has a store of beautiful old treasures in her chests, locked out of sight. She would not give one away for the world! Not she! What a foolish old lady she is! When she is dead, the girls will ransack her boxes, and dress themselves up in the pretty necklaces and bracelets, without giving her

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one kind thought or word of thanks. She kept them from them as long as she could. Why should they thank her? If she turns over her treasures and selects one pretty thing for Margaret, and another for Kate, and the prettiest of all for sweet little Mabel, she will be overwhelmed with caresses and thanks, and the girls will think, "Auntie is not selfish after all!" and will begin to love her.

Don't call them mercenary; they are nothing of the sort. It is natural they should like pretty things, and natural that they should love those who give them to them. If you wish to be happy, don't save your money and treasures to be quarrelled over when you are lying beneath the grass. Buy love when living, and then dying itself will be easier. If you do not know the pleasure of giving, it is quite time you found it out.

"I have not given a Christmas box to any one except the postman for years," you say. I am sorry for you; but it is never too late to mend. Here is one more chance for you; make the most of it; you may never have another.

There are homes where one good resolution would bring the light of a great joy. Suppose that young husband gave to his wife the glad news that he meant for the future to abstain from the drink that

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was ruining the happiness of his home. Would she have a happy Christmas, think you?

Suppose that both husband and wife, waking on the dawn of Christmas Day, resolved to give themselves to the one happy service, and claim for themselves a right to the hitherto despised name of Christian. It would be a memorable day for them.

I wonder if any one's Christmas Day will be any happier for these words of mine? I should like, a day or two after Christmas, to receive a thousand letters, telling me of a bright and glad "twenty fifth." I should like to hear of "father's secret," and mother's ready sympathy and love; of boys and girls making their parents' hearts glad; of socks filled high; of merry games and fun; of orphans and widows made happy; and of Santa Claus finding his way to all sorts of queer places.

And I should like to hear of old wrongs forgiven, old wounds quite healed, old love restored.

I should like to hear of children who have found out that it is more blessed to give than to receive, and who, with my little friend Lionel, can say, "I like to be a ministering children!"

Now I think I have said quite enough. Some one will say "too much," perhaps; too much about presents. Well, I believe in presents; I like to

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receive them, and like to give them. It is a good old patriarchal custom, too, and if you read your Bible you will find that Jacob went to meet his brother with presents; that Isaac sent presents to the ruler of Egypt; that the wise men themselves took gifts to the little Child Jesus. So do not despise presents; try their effect first on others, and take notice of their effect on yourself. If you do not feel the better for a Christmas box given by loving hands, then I really must give you up!

And now I have only to say this: Give as much pleasure and joy as you can, take as much as you can, and may the loving Father give you a Happy Christmas and a Glad New Year.

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The Runnel Rocks.

THE name of the point to the right of our bay was Runnel Point, and a ledge of rocks running out to sea were called the Runnel Rocks. They were more than a mile long, and were very dangerous to passing vessels. A shipwreck on the Runnel Rocks was no uncommon thing.

When the tide was out we could scramble over the slippery seaweed to a certain sharp-pointed cluster of rocks which rose high out of the water. It was called the Warning by the natives, and a very good name it was too. Beyond this it was impossible to go.

We had got into more trouble on the Runnel

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Rocks than in any other place in the neighbourhood. Every one of us boys, except Toddie and Teddie,—and they came in for it as they grew older,—had slipped off the ledge at a certain narrow part where the footing was insecure. Every one of us had missed a certain leap, and gone floundering into the water, and every one of us had been tide-bound on the Warning.

We had sprained our ankles, dislocated our bones, and rubbed all the skin off knees and elbows, to say nothing of innumerable minor injuries such as bruises and cuts. I suppose this accounted for our affection for the rocks; we were never happier than when settled comfortably down on the Warning, with hook and line.

On Runnel Point the coastguards had a small fort, and down in the hollow was the coastguard station. We knew all the men well, and at one time were friendly with the captain. He was a blunt old seaman, a capital officer, and thoroughly liked and respected by the men. But he was moved on to another station, and a fellow named Lister came instead. No one liked him; he was arbitrary and tyrannical, and soon made enemies. He exacted a servile obedience, and the men kicked against it of course.

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Once, I remember, we were roused by the sound of the cannon at the fort. It was the usual signal for a ship in distress, and not only the coastguard men and the villagers, but the Lansel people came pouring out to see what was going on. It was a dark, cold, boisterous night, and you may imagine their wrath when they found it was all a hoax of that precious Captain Lister's. It was no joke to turn out of a warm bed in the middle of a winter night, and rush through wind and rain to the bleak point. Some of the men vowed vengeance, but they could do nothing. There was a row about it in the papers, and Lister had some pretty sharp raps, for which he cared just nothing. But he never repeated his joke.

It was about six weeks after that we again heard the report of the gun at night. It was eleven o'clock, and we were just off to bed when Murrel dashed into the room, half-dressed, and wild with excitement.

"The gun!" he said breathlessly. "There's a ship on the Runnel Rocks! Listen!"

It was the signal sure enough, booming out amid the roar of wind and wave. Hugh threw open the window, but such a gust came in that he was glad to shut it.

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Bert came shivering out on the landing. "Do you think it would hurt me to go, Guy?" he asked, his thin face flushed with excitement. "It is so hard to stay here while you are all out."

"I know it is, dear old fellow," said I, wishing with all my heart that I dared say "Come." "But it's an awful night, Bert! Mother would never forgive me if you came. You ought to be in bed now."

He went back without a word. You never heard Bert grumble.

"My dear boys," said mother's gentle voice, "do be careful! Thorald, I give Murrel into your charge. Don't do anything rash."

Edda and Madge showed their heads over the balustrade, eager to hear.

"What is it?" cried the latter. "Where are you going? Oh, mother! you said I should go the next time there was a shipwreck!"

"It is not fit for you to go out, Madge; you would be blown away. It may not be a shipwreck at all."

"But if it is, mother? Guy, won't you come back and fetch me? I'll promise to hold your hand or your coat all the time."

"My dear, you must not think of going!" said

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mother mildly but decidedly; upon which Madge began to cry. "I don't believe it is a shipwreck at all!" she said, divided between anger and grief. "It's only that horrid Captain Lister again; and it will serve you right for not taking me. I'll never speak to you again, Murrel."

"But I can't help it!" expostulated Murrel, almost as sorry for her as she was for herself. "I'll hurry back and tell you all about it, Madge, if you won't cry."

Hugh was already half-way down the drive, and we rushed after him. It was a fearful night. The wind blew a regular hurricane, and the waves were having a nice time of it, carrying everything before them. We found a little crowd at the fort. Old Hensman was there, ready for work as usual. Nothing came amiss to him.

The moon was struggling out from behind the clouds, and by the faint light we could just see a dark mass out beyond the Warning, and dangerously near the Runnel Rocks.

"If she strikes she's a lost ship!" said Hensman solemnly. "Nothing can save her."

There are few things more awful than a shipwreck at night, especially such a night as that. I hated the sea as I watched its pitiless, powerful

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waves, and thought of the poor fellows on board waiting for their doom.

We had no lifeboat, though I suppose few places on the coast needed one more. Thorald came behind me and put his hands on my shoulders.

"Guy," he said, "I shall never rest till we have a lifeboat here. This is awful!"

I knew what he meant; the waiting and watching, and only the rockets to depend on.

The clouds gathered over the moon just then, and it was dark as pitch. Pressing round behind the fort my foot slipped, and I rolled down the slope into a little hollow. When I tried to rise I found I had sprained my ankle, and I could not stand. I shouted, hoping Hugh or Thorald would hear; but what with the wind and the waves, and the shouts of the men to each other, there was little chance. I sat down on a stone and rubbed my ankle, trying to see what was going on in the darkness ahead. I should think it must have been half an hour before I could use my foot. I climbed up to the top and caught hold of the first man I saw.

"Where is she now?" I asked.

"On the Runnel Rocks!" he answered quietly, and I knew by his voice that he was ready for the worst. It was old Hensman.

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I found the captain swearing like a trooper. There was something wrong with the rockets, and he was giving it to the men hot and strong.

"I wish he was aboard her himself," I heard one of them say.

"That you might have the pleasure of saving him?" I said.

"Ther'd be something wrong with all the rockets, that's all, Master Guy." He knew me, though I could not in the darkness see who he was.

I forgot all about my foot in the excitement of the next few hours. The vessel was doomed, but we did our best for the crew. The moon came out and helped us a bit, but it was a miserable, watery light.

The people from Lansel were coming down in crowds, hundreds of them. Old May was there, of course; and the new doctor, a young fellow who had lately come from London—Franklin his name was.

"Plenty of work for us both to-night, Mr. Franklin," said May kindly.

The moon was shining on young Franklin's face, and I saw his start and look of astonishment and pleasure. It was the first time Dr. May had ever spoken to him. He stretched out his hand impulsively, and May shook it in quite a fatherly way.

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There was plenty of work for them to do that night. The rocket-line was fixed at last, and one by one the passengers and crew were brought to land. The rain was coming down in torrents, drenching us to the skin, and the wind was bitterly cold. I was looking round for Thorald, wonderin what he had done with himself, when I heard the rattle of wheels close by, and the crowd gave way. It was a huge farm waggon, covered with tarpaulin, and drawn by a couple of stout farm horses. To my astonishment Thorald was driving. He had been to Blackthorpe, and roused Wright, and they had harnessed the strongest horses on the farm and brought them down. Wright and one of his men were at the horses' heads.

I elbowed my way into the fort, where May and Franklin were busy with the rescued passengers. They had turned out all but those who were helping, and the door was guarded. They let me in, and I told May the waggon was waiting to take the poor half-drowned fellows to more comfortable lodgings, and he looked relieved. "I shall be glad to get some of them off, Guy; look here."

He knelt down by the side of a tall gentlemanly-looking man with an ugly cut on his temple, and bent over him for a moment.

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"Come and take my place, and watch him while I send some of them off. He is not dead; don't be afraid. Call me the moment he moves."

He went off, and I stayed by my strange charge. There were several women there, and May sent them out first. One of them had a baby in her arms.

Hugh came up to me, his face white with excitement and cold. "Look here, Guy," he said, laying a little bundle in my arms. "She is not hurt at all, the little darling! Hold her a minute; Franklin wants me. I am going to take her up to the mother."

"Her! who?" I said, in a maze; but he was gone. I unfolded a corner of the cloak wrapped round the bundle, and peeped in. It was a little fair-haired girl, with large violet eyes wide open, and full of tears.

I don't think I ever was more astonished in all my life. I looked at the child, and she looked at me; but she did not speak. She was drenched, poor little mite, and frightened to death.

"Hallo!" said May, touching me lightly on the shoulder, "what have you got there?" He stooped, and peeped in, as I had done, and then smiled, and patted the little wet face.

"Run off with her as fast as you can, and tell some

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of the women to put her into a warm bed. Good little girl!"

The child smiled, and said something about "father." I looked round for Hugh, but he had disappeared. I went to the door, and tried to get out, but a gust of wind blew me back with tremendous force. The storm was raging as high as ever, and I was obliged to wait. In a few minutes I tried again, but only lost my cap for my pains.

"It is no use, Sir," said one of the men. "You must give up your load or bide a bit. This can't last much longer."

"It's a child, Ben!" I cried, shouting to make him hear through the uproar, "saved from the wreck." He wanted to take her from me, but I held tight to my prize. I felt quite an affection for her by that time. Where Hugh had gone I could not imagine. It was rather cool of him, I thought, to give the child to me and then go off. However, there was no help for it; I must either give the little thing up to some one else or take it home at once. I chose the latter.

When at last I had struggled over the lower downs and reached home, I found no one but mother and the children there. All the servants, and even my father, had gone off to the fort.

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Madge had cried herself ill almost, and was lying full length on the rug, sobbing. The moment I made my appearance she sprang up and began to ask me to take her out; but she stopped on seeing my burden. I gave it to the mother, and just stopped to answer her anxious questions, and was off again. When I got back it was all over; they had saved the last life that could be saved, and were helplessly watching the huge waves dash and break over the wrecked ship.

I shall never forget the scene: the cold, miserable dawn; the turmoil on the rocks below; the wretched, haggard faces of the tired men; and the lonely, broken wreck, far out on the Runnel Rocks.

"If only we could have saved them all!" said old Hensman sadly, as I stopped by his side. "It's an awful thing for men to die almost within reach of one's hand."

"But are they not all saved?" I said, gazing at the broken mass, over which the waves were running riot. "Are any lost, Hensman?"

"Ay, Master Guy!"

"How many?"

"That we don't know yet. One poor fellow was washed up just now. The captain came ashore last, 'most dead, and he said some were washed off the deck."

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"Where is the captain?"

"Dr. May have took him home with him. You'd best go back to bed, Master Guy! You'll be laid up with rheumatic fever if you don't look out."

I could see nothing of the others, and was not sorry to leave that wretched fort, as there was no more to be done. I never was so tired in my life before.

I found Hugh and Thorald roasting themselves by a splendid fire in our bedroom. Murrel had already gone to bed tired out.

Mother brought us plenty of hot coffee, and told us that our little guest was fast asleep. She was our first thought when we awoke about midday, and we hurried down to see her.

She was the prettiest little thing I had ever seen, and had the most fascinating little ways of her own. I suppose she was about three years old, and was very slight.

She could not talk plainly, and the babyish lisp delighted the younger ones. Murrel was on his knees before her begging for a kiss, and she was flirting with him in an irresistibly comical manner. "Pitty boy," she called him, and Murrel actually blushed. It was a joke against him for many a day.

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She said her name was "Theslie," and Madge was hunting over a list of names to find what Theslie was like. Bert suggested Leslie, and as she answered to the name, we concluded it was the right one. Thyra and Murrel were evidently her favourites Madge she would not look at!

Poor old Bert was paying dearly for the night's excitement, and was lying on the couch with black rings round his eyes.

"She won't speak to me," he said. "I believe she is afraid of me. Toddie and Teddie are evidently too young for her ladyship! She treats them with the utmost indifference. Madge and Hugh are beneath notice; and Thor is only vouchsafed an occasional word. See if she will speak to you, Guy."

She came to me in a moment when I held out my arms. "He carried Theslie," she said, remembering me at once.

"I wonder who she is. Hugh, my dear, you had better go and make inquiries," said the mother. "If her parents are alive, they must be in a fearful state of anxiety."

Strange to say, no one had thought of finding the little thing's friends. Hugh and I started off at once, though we were so stiff we could scarcely

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walk. A little way down the road we met May, driving at a pace old Forrest was evidently unused to, and resented accordingly. He drew up as we came alongside.

"Guy, what is the name of that child you had in your arms last night, and where is she now?"

"At home, with mother and the children. She calls herself Theslie: we think she means Leslie."

"Is she a little fair-haired, blue-eyed girl, about three years old?"

"That's her description," said Hugh, and May looked as if a weight were taken off his shoulders.

"Hugh, I wish you'd go to Lansel for me; those long legs will soon get over the ground. That child's father is at my house, too ill to move, and pretty nearly off his head about her. I'm pretty nearly off my head, I know!"

"What shall we do?" said Hugh, preparing to start.

"Tell him she is safe: that's all. There cannot be any mistake; the child knows her own name, or I would say take her with you. He will ask you fifty questions: answer them, and come away. Don't stop talking about anything else."

Off we went, full speed, forgetting our stiffness as we got warm. May's assistant came to the door of

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the surgery, so we drew up there instead of going round to the house-door. We told him the doctor had sent us with a message to his patient, but took pretty good care not to say what it was.

"What's his name?" asked Hugh, drawing back in the hall.

"Colonel Winfield. Have you brought news of his little girl? Perhaps I had better go in first, and tell him you are here. Is it about his little girl?" said the assistant politely.

"It is a message from Dr. May," said Hugh. "You had better tell him we are here, I dare say."

We waited a minute outside, hearing all that was said, and then went in. Colonel Winfield was lying on a couch by the fire, and as he turned his head I recognised him as the man by whose side I had watched the previous night. He looked wretchedly ill, and spoke scarcely above a whisper.

"What message has Dr. May sent?" I never saw such an eager, hungry look in any man's eyes as there was in his as he waited for the reply. I thought what a terrible blow it would be if it were all a mistake; it almost took away my breath.

Hugh answered him.

"There is a little girl at our house who says her name is Theslie, and Dr. May"——

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He stopped short in utter astonishment as Colonel Winfield sprang to his feet, his face glowing with new life.

"Where is she? How far off is it? Is she unhurt? Can I walk there?" These and half-a-dozen other questions poured from his lips, and then, of course, the reaction came, and he sank back faint and exhausted. The assistant looked unutterably disgusted. If we had only told him that the little girl was safe, and let him break the news gently, all this might have been avoided. He didn't say this, but he looked it. My opinion is that he would have made a worse mess of it than we did.

Having promised to send the child over, we left him, and went back to the fort. One of the townsmen was going, and gave us a ride in his trap. There were not many people there; the sightseers had been and gone. The tide was low, but the waves were still running pretty high, though the storm had abated.

Hugh went down to the coastguard station to find May, and ask if "Theslie," as we already called her, might go at once to her father. I stayed watching the wreck, when Thorald made his appearance from inside the fort.

"Guy," he said in a tone I knew well. When

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Thorald was roused or excited he always spoke with extra coolness and deliberation. "Come here a moment."

I followed him into the fort. One of the men was there, looking out through his telescope, which he gave up to me at Thorald's request. "Look at the Warning, Guy; look between the two half-way points. Can you see? Now, watch a minute."

I watched for a few minutes, but could see nothing but the white foam of the breakers.

"Wait a bit," persisted Thorald. "Don't look away. Keep your eye on the opening between the points of rock."

I kept my eye steadily fixed, and suddenly saw something move. It was only a slight movement, but perfectly distinct from that of seaweed washed backwards and forwards.

"What can it be?" I cried, breathless with this new excitement. "No human being could live after being washed up on the Warning in such a storm as last night's!"

"Nevertheless it does live," replied Thorald coolly.

"How long before the tide is at its lowest, Webb?"

"In exactly half an hour, Sir. The captain will send a boat round, Sir, if Dr. May asks him."

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"A boat could not get within twenty yards of the Warning."

"But they could see if any one was really there," said Webb, who hadn't seen any movement, and did not believe in it. Thorald's lips compressed, and he walked out. A steep flight of stone steps led from the point to the beach below, and down these he ran.

"Well, Thorald," I said, overtaking him on the narrow ledge at the foot. He looked in my face, and his lips twitched nervously.

"Can you do it, Guy?"

I nodded, and he drew a strong thin rope from under his great-coat. We threw off our coats and secured the two ends of the rope round our waists. No one could see us, for we were under a projecting rock.

"We will wait twenty minutes, and then go," said Thorald, in precisely the same tone as if he had been saying it was time to go to bed.

The Runnel Rocks were gradually showing more and more of their treacherous brown juts and points. Along the top lay a pretty clear path to within a few yards of the Warning. Every now and then a higher wave than its fellows just moved the seaweed with which the top of the ledge was covered.

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Thorald went first, carefully stepping on the slippery seaweed. I followed at a little distance. There was not much danger there; when we got farther on there was. If we had not known every step of the way, it would have been impossible to proceed. As it was, we reached a large flat rock, within six yards of the Warning, in safety. Here we stopped.

In front of us the sullen, heavy waves dashed through a broad opening in the ledge, rising with a dull thud on the rock on either side. The spray drenched us, but we did not care for that; the water washed over our feet, but we were scarcely conscious of it. All our thoughts were concentrated on the one absorbing question, *What was lying on the other side of the Warning?* "I will go first," said Thorald. "You had better hold to that rock with one arm; if I fall I don't want to drag you in, but you to drag me out. I have cleared a greater distance than that, Guy."

"Yes; but not with a thundering big wave rushing under you, and only slippery seaweed to fall on," said I.

He made no reply, but stood calculating the distance. A huge wave came dashing in, and he waited till it had passed.

"Hold on, Guy," he said, and sprang. The sea-

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weed gave him no foothold, and he slipped and fell. Close to him was one of those washed-out hollows in the rock which you sometimes see. It was shaped like a canoe, and had a span of rock left right across the top, like the handle of a basket. He plunged both his arms in the hollow, which was full of sea-weed and water, and held on to the span of rock like grim death.

On came a giant wave, sweeping through the narrow channel; it lifted him right up and swung him round! The spray dashed up in my face, blinding me, and I clung to my projecting jut with despairing energy. The next moment I saw him clambering up the rocks to a place of safety. He turned a white but cheery face toward me, and nodded pleasantly.

"All right, old fellow, I'm safe. You had better wait there till I see if there is anything to come over for."

He unfastened the rope from his waist, and noosing it threw it over one of the points. It was safe climbing now to the Warning.

I watched him picking his way over the sharp, half-hidden rocks. Then he reached the Warning, put his arm round one of the points, and swung round to the other side.

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The moment he had disappeared a perfect horror of suspense fell upon me. I tried to wait patiently, and dare say I should have succeeded if I had not caught the sound of his voice. He was speaking to some one on the other side of the Warning! I could not stand that!

The water was low in the channel, and I could see no approaching wave big enough to frighten me. I did not wait to think, but sprang, and alighted safely. In less than a minute I was on the Warning.

On a narrow flat ledge lay the body of a man—a sailor. His face was covered by seaweed, and huge masses of it were lying across his body. Round his neck a blue handkerchief was knotted in a peculiar way, and formed a sort of little hammock behind. There was a tiny ledge of rock just above his head, and on this stood, or rather crouched, a little shivering black-and-tan terrier. Thorald was trying to coax it to come to him; but the poor little thing was half dead with cold and fright, and only snapped at him.

"Is he dead?" I whispered, glancing at the still form at our feet. Thorald nodded, but kept his eyes on the dog. "I can't look at him!" he said, in a queer, choking voice. "Reach over and take the

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dog, Guy." He was as white as a sheet, and leaned back against a rock.

I had a bit of biscuit in my pocket, and when I offered it to the little thing he took it eagerly, and after that offered no opposition when I tried to take him up. Thorald took him from me and turned away.

I stooped and touched the brown hand lying on the seaweed. It was deadly cold, and there was no pulse. I lifted the seaweed from the face, and saw that he was dead. Without a word we retraced our steps, finding it much easier than when we came.

A crowd of eager watchers were on Runnel Point waiting for our return, Webb among them. We ran up the steps, and they crowded round to look at the dog. While we were speaking Captain Lister came up, and Webb began to tell him. Thorald and I walked off.

We took the dog home, and, to our astonishment, found Colonel Winfield there. It seemed that after we had left him he had rung the bell, ordered a cab, and driven straight to our house. May came after him, and found him none the worse for the effort.

"Theslie" recognized the dog at once, and so did her father. It was the pet of the crew, and had belonged especially to a man named Foster. When

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I described the poor fellow on the Warning, the Colonel thought he was the man, and so it turned out to be.

The captain of the ship wanted the dog badly, but Thorald would not give it up. Certainly he had the greatest claim to it. It was Thorald's pet for many a year, and was a general plaything.

Colonel Winfield took his little girl away with him in a few days; but we often saw her in after years. She brought trouble to us, as people saved from the sea are said to do to those who receive them. Still, it was not her fault altogether, so I must not blame her. She was a dear little child in those first years of our acquaintance.

There were many other shipwrecks on the Runnel Rocks, but none in which we were so interested. Thorald and I never forgot that visit to the Warning. The men went round with a boat and fetched Foster, and he was buried with two others in Lansel churchyard. It was rather a puzzle how he had saved the dog, but Thor and I always thought he had carried it slung round his neck in that blue handkerchief.

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The Ghost in Birkett Bay.

THERE was a curious little bay about a couple of miles along the coast, known as Birkett Bay among the fishermen. There was some legend attached to it, but I am sure I forget what it was. We boys had been there several times, but it was not the sort of place to attract us much. It had a flat little bit of beach, above which the cliff rose almost perpendicularly to a height of about seven hundred feet. There was no way of getting to it except by boat, and as there was nothing to repay us when we got there, we did not honour it much with our company.

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Even the gulls avoided it, so a more lonely spot could not have been found.

It was about this bay we heard the men talking one day down at the little stone quay, and of course we stopped to listen. Old Hensman was laughing fit to kill himself.

"Ghost!" he said, "I'd like to see one. A queer kind o' fish, I reckon."

"He says it's dressed in white, and flings its arms about so," said one of the fisher-lads, gesticulating violently. "He's seen it three nights running."

"Who has seen what?" asked Hugh unceremoniously.

"Bob Farren, Master Hugh; he's seen a ghost in Birkett Bay," cried two or three in chorus, and Hensman went off again.

"I didn't think that young Bob were such a fool," he said, when he could get his breath. "Look'ee here, Master Hugh, 'tain't often there's a ghost for the catching; shall we go round with the nets and have a try? The British Museum will likely buy it, dead or alive."

"Well, Bob have seen it," said a lad astride the low wall. "*He's* scared enough, I can tell you. It's ghost enough to frighten him, and what more ghost do you want?"

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"Have *you* seen it?" I asked.

"No; I'm going up to-night, though—Bob and me."

"Where is Bob?" asked Hugh.

"There he is, just coming round the point. He'll tell you what it's like. It's a real ghost."

"I dare say," said Hugh incredulously.

We swung over the wall and went down to the water's edge, and hailed Bob. In a short time he came sailing alongside in his little weather-beaten boat, and asked if we wanted to go out in the bay.

"No," said Hugh; "we want to hear about the ghost."

Bob's face changed at once, and he began to take in the sail in silence.

"Well," said Hugh, as at last he stepped on the quay, "what is it, Bob?"

"You'd best come and see," was the short reply. "You won't believe me if I tell you."

"No, I suppose we sha'n't," replied Hugh reflectively, "not if you tell us it's a ghost. But what is it like, Bob?"

"Like a ghost," said Bob sullenly.

"There are all sorts of ghosts," said Hugh. "Is this a man or a woman ghost? Come, Bob, don't be stupid."

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Bob looked round. The men were out of hearing, and only Joe, the boy who was going ghost-hunting, was near.

"Well, Master Hugh," he said, lowering his voice, "if it ain't a ghost, I don't know what it is. It walks up and down that bit of beach in the moonlight and waves its hands—so!"

"Is it dressed in white?" asked Murrel breathlessly.

Bob nodded.

"All white from head to foot, Master Murrel; it made me creep."

"How many times have you seen it, Bob?"

"Three times running. Look here, Master Hugh, I never said anything to anybody about it at first, because I wanted to make quite sure. I went there the next night, and there it was again! And I went last night."

"And it was still there?"

"Yes, Sir. Joe and me are going to have another look to-night."

"Why don't you row round to the bay and catch it?" asked Murrel.

Bob stared. "Me! go to Birkett Bay at night! Not if I know it!"

"Are you afraid?"

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"Would *you* go?" retorted Bob. "I'll lend you my boat, and welcome."

"Did the ghost see you?" asked Hugh, after a pause.

"Not it! I took good care of that! I lay down on the ground, and watched it over the edge of the cliff."

Hugh looked at me and whistled. It was evident enough that Bob was not deceiving us; then what was the ghost?

"A practical joke," said Hugh decisively.

"Upon whom?" I asked, not seeing the use of practical jokes at Birkett Bay, where no one ever went. "I wonder if it will be there to-night?"

Hugh gave me a warning look, and I held my tongue.

All the way home Murrel talked of nothing but the ghost. Bob's story had fired his curiosity, and he was boiling over with excitement. Of course he rushed straight up to Madge with the news, and the two were wild over it all the evening. Thorald was at Lansel, and did not come home till late. He had taken a fancy to old May since the fire at Blackthorpe, and used to spend many an hour driving about the country with him. That was

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how he first came to think of taking to the medical profession. May talked him into a real liking for it.

He laughed when he heard Madge's tale of the ghost, and told her she was a little goose.

This touched her ladyship's dignity, and she went off in a huff. Murrel ran after her, and Thorald looked at Hugh.

"Out with it," he said; "I can see something's in the wind. What's up now?"

"The ghost," said Hugh seriously. "A real, live ghost! The time has come, my boy, for us to distinguish ourselves, and add lustre to our already illustrious name by the capture of a ghost! Our father will probably embalm it, or preserve it in spirits of wine, for the benefit of succeeding generations. The interesting stranger is awaiting capture in Birkett Bay."

"A hoax," said Thorald coolly. "Some idiot of a fellow trying to frighten the natives."

"And succeeding admirably. You should have seen Bob's face when Murrel suggested a moonlight row to Birkett Bay. The thing is, how does the ghost get there? There's no way down the cliff. We've tried that often enough to know."

"It's no ghost!" scoffed Thorald. "Let us go

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and have a look at it to-night. I dare say Bob was too frightened to use his eyes."

"Keep it quiet," I said; "it won't do to let the young ones hear. They'll want to come too, and will be frightened out of their senses."

"I'm sure I sha'n't!" cried Murrel's indignant voice from the doorway. "I am no more afraid of ghosts than you, Guy."

"What business had you to be listening?" demanded Hugh, pouncing upon him and swinging him round; "I have a good mind to take you and pitch you over the cliff."

"I wasn't listening; I came straight upstairs and just heard what Guy said. Are you really going, Hugh? Oh, do take me with you! I am not one bit afraid, and I do so want to see it."

"See what?"

"The ghost," said Murrel, stoutly.

"Shall we take him?" asked Hugh.

"Then Madge will want to come," replied Thorald. "We don't want a pack of children at our heels. Where is Madge?"

"Downstairs. Look here, Murrel, we will take you with us if you promise faithfully to say nothing about it to any one: not even Bert."

Bert was nervous and excitable, and we thought it

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best for him to know nothing about the whole affair. Not that he would have wanted to come with us; but he would have kept awake worrying till we came back. Murrel promised readily, but had hard work to keep his promise. As if by instinct Madge knew that something was going on, from which she was excluded, and it did not take her sharp wits long to guess the truth. Murrel had a hard time of it till she went to bed.

About ten o'clock we started off. It was a clear night, and the moon was just rising, like a great red fireball. We ran quietly down the shrubbery and jumped over the railings into the little copse which lay beyond. There was a path through the copse which took us by a near cut out on the downs.

"I hope it will be there," whispered Murrel, his voice full of suppressed excitement. "What will you do if it is, Hugh?"

"I know what I should like to do," said Hugh, who was beginning to feel the influence of our novel errand. "I should like to take a boat and row round and land."

"Well, why not?" asked Thorald's cool voice. "What's that?"

He suddenly stopped, and we heard a strange muffled cry. We all stood still and listened.

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"It was in the copse," whispered Murrel. "Was it the ghost, do you think, Guy?"

"Ghosts don't cry!" replied Hugh. "More likely some one who has seen the ghost."

"Hush!" said Thorald.

We heard the cry again, and to our astonishment Murrel set off at full speed up the narrow path. Of course we followed, and came upon Madge huddled up under a tree, sobbing and trembling, with her frock over her head.

"You little idiot!" cried Hugh, shaking her. "What are you doing here at this time of night?"

"I wanted to see the ghost!" she sobbed. "I knew you were going to take Murrel, and it wasn't fair."

"Fair! A nice one you are to see a ghost! You would raise the whole neighbourhood! What are you crying for now?"

"I thought you had gone another way, and I daren't go home alone," she said, still shivering and sobbing. "Will you take me home, Murrel?"

Murrel's face grew considerably longer. "If you are really afraid, Madge," he said reluctantly. "I suppose she mustn't come with us?"

"Oh! no! no!" cried Madge. "I don't want to see it again!"

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"Again!" echoed Hugh. "What have you seen, Madge?"

"The ghost! it went down there," she said, looking fearfully round. "Let me go home now, I don't want to see it again!"

We looked at each other. Had the ghost really come from Birkett Bay to our little copse, or had she seen something else?

"That path leads to nowhere," said Murrel; "so the ghost hasn't gone far."

He ran to the top of the path and looked down, and then burst into a fit of laughter. "Oh! you little goose, Madge!" At the sound of his voice there was a stir in the brushwood, and Buttercup, the children's white goat, pushed his knowing old face through the boughs. Murrel seized his horns, and dragging him out, brought him to us in triumph. "Madge's ghost!" he said, as soon as he could speak; "he'll take you home, Madge."

"There, you stupid little thing," said Hugh, who was really angry. "See what a fuss you have made about nothing. I have a good mind to make you come with us as a punishment."

This frightened Madge, whose desire for the adventure had all vanished. What she wanted was to get home as quickly as she could, and get back to

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bed without mother or Deborah finding her out. She was really dreadfully frightened, and Thorald took compassion on her.

"Come along, little Marplot," he said, taking her hand. "It is a great mistake you are not a boy. Don't go too fast, Hugh; I will soon be after you."

He overtook us long before we reached Birkett Bay. The moon was shining brightly enough, and there was scarcely a cloud to be seen. We spoke low, and as we drew near the point where we could catch our first glimpse of the beach, we stopped talking altogether. I don't know how the others felt, but I was too excited to speak.

Just as we reached the little opening in the cliff, the clock at Lansel Church struck eleven. A dark figure on the ground suddenly raised its hand, and waved us back. For the moment we were startled, for we had forgotten Bob. He came crawling out of the little hollow to meet us.

"Hush, Master Hugh! it is there!"

We threw ourselves down and crawled to the edge of the cliff in the little hollow. Joe was there, but too absorbed to move. Here lay the stretch of quiet beach, the waves breaking almost noiselessly upon its sands. And there, in the moonlight, stood a tall white figure, with its arms upraised in the air.

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It did not move, and we watched it, breathless. Presently it began to move slowly up and down the beach, now passing into the shadow of the rocks, now coming out into the full moonlight. I glanced at the others. Thorald was coolly fixing an opera-glass; Murrel's face was one blaze of excitement. I could not see Hugh's. As for Bob and Joe, they were as white as ghosts themselves! I believe Joe's teeth were chattering. I did not believe in ghosts one bit myself, but I felt rather queer; you see, if it were not a ghost, it was something that did as well.

I should think we lay there half an hour watching the wretched thing, and then Thorald passed me the glass.

"Look at its feet," he whispered.

I looked, but could not make anything out.

"Well?" said Thorald.

"Well?" I repeated, staring at him. "What is it?"

"A ghost, of course!" he said, laughing quietly.

Murrel turned his head.

"Let us shout," he whispered; "let us shout and see what it will do!"

"Nonsense! hold your tongue, Murrel," said Hugh sharply. "Look! there! it is gone!"

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It was gone sure enough, though where we could not tell. We looked at each other in silence.

"Now, Sir!" said Bob triumphantly, "isn't it a ghost?"

"I will tell you this day week," replied Thorald. "Now then, Murrel, home and to bed with you."

We raced over the downs and got safely into our various rooms, undiscovered by any one. The next morning we held a consultation.

"Of course it isn't a ghost," said Hugh meditatively. "The question is, what or who is it? I should like to find out. It is such a strange place for a practical joke."

"I don't believe it is a joke," said Thorald.

Murrel did open his eyes. "You don't think it is really a ghost, Thor?" he cried.

"I don't quite see how we are to do it," continued Thorald, resting his chin on his two hands, and gazing absently out of the window.

"Do what?" said I.

"Get round to the bay without its seeing us," was the unexpected reply, and Murrel nearly jumped off his seat.

"It is quite dark before the moon rises," ruminated Hugh. "Could we row round the point and land on the rocks, and then creep along in the

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shadow? I don't see why we should not. Shall we go round this afternoon and have a look at the place?"

"And put the ghost on its guard! No, thank you."

I'm afraid we rather tried that long-suffering curate's patience that morning. A ghost hunt was too novel an adventure to allow our thoughts to fix themselves on books. On our return home Edda met us with an anxious look. I saw at once that Madge had been telling tales. She couldn't keep anything in to save her life.

"Well, Edda, what's up now?" asked Hugh. He and Edda always got on together.

"Madge has been telling mamma about the ghost. She says you boys have been to see it."

"Well, what of it?"

"Mamma is nervous about it, Hugh; she is so afraid you will get mixed up in some row. Of course it is some one playing a trick, and there is no knowing what they may do."

"I'll make it all right with the mother," said Thorald, who knew how to manage her better than any of us. "I wish you would cut a piece of Madge's tongue, Edda."

"I dare say you do!" said that young lady

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saucily, showing her curly head at the open window. "Mamma wanted to know what the noise was, and I was obliged to tell her. Have you brought home the ghost?"

"Yes, it is on the lawn," said Hugh significantly. Madge tossed her head defiantly, but said no more. Buttercup was not a very pleasant subject.

The only objection mother made was to our taking Murrel. We elder ones had been in too many adventures and scrapes for her to feel very anxious about us; but Murrel was different. I don't know how many extraordinary promises he made for himself, and Hugh for him, before she said he might go.

It was fortunate for herself as well as for us that the dear little mother was not nervous. I believe she enjoyed a thoroughly good adventure almost as much as we did. That's how it was we told her everything; it was so jolly to have one's own mother laughing over an affair as if she had been one of us. The fact is, she was one of us.

Murrel went down to the village and brought back a regular yarn. Bob and Joe had been frightening some of the women and girls out of their senses, and getting themselves into trouble with their stupid talk. The men thought it was a

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hoax, and threatened a beating, whereat Bob was in a nice state of wrath.

"To-night or never," said Thorald. "In a day or two the whole village will be up there, and our chance gone."

It was a cloudy night, for which we were not at all sorry. We went down to the quay, and unfastened Hensman's little boat, it being lighter and not so clumsy as Bob's. We had free use of more than one boat.

Hugh and Thorald took the oars and muffled them before we started, and then off we went. It was as dark as pitch then, but it cleared off a little as we neared the point. Hugh put out the lantern, and we rowed round into Birkett Bay by the light of the stars. The moon was too well covered by clouds to be of service or disservice.

We landed near the point, and made the boat fast. Thorald took hold of my arm.

"Wait a minute," he whispered. "Have you any idea what you are going to catch?"

I could not say that I had. I wasn't quite sure that we were going to catch anything.

"It is no joke," went on Thorald. "It is some one in hiding."

"From the police?" whispered Murrel eagerly.

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"Most likely. It's my belief he doesn't know he's been watched, and has a hiding-place among the rocks. We must be careful."

Careful! when for aught we knew a full-fledged burglar was within reach!

There was just light enough for us to steal silently on over the huge rocks, keeping well back against the cliff. Thorald went first, and then Murrel; Hugh and I kept together. Presently the moon shone out, but not on us; we were safe enough. I glanced up the cliff, and wondered if Bob were watching; but there was no sign of any one. It was no easy work crawling along those slimy rocks, sometimes on all fours. We had to stop and rest every now and then.

Suddenly Thorald stopped and sank behind a rock, waving his hand violently. Down we went, like so many ninepins, and Thorald crept back.

"It is there!" he whispered.

There was a cluster of huge boulders between us and the open beach. We stole noiselessly up to them and cautiously raised our heads. There, not forty yards off, stood the ghost in the full moonlight!

Talk about a sensation! I never was so startled in my life! I believe my hair stood on end.

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Hugh's hand was on my arm like a vice. I told him afterwards he must have thought I was the ghost! I carried the mark of his thumb and fingers for many a day.

We had only just time to give one glance at the ghost when it moved and came towards us. Hugh and I sank down into a little hollow, where we could neither see nor be seen. Where Thorald and Murrel were we could not see; but they were somewhere between us and the strip of sand and shingle at the water's edge.

On came the ghost; we could distinctly hear the fall of its footsteps on the hard beach, drawing nearer and nearer our hiding-place. We scarcely dared breathe.

A thought, not a very pleasant one, came into my head. Suppose this thief in hiding, if it were one, were provided with firearms, and made use of them! It would be a bad end to the adventure. I fancy the same idea struck Hugh, for he whispered,

"Keep a sharp look out on Murrel, Guy. It won't do for any harm to come to little Benjamin."

I remembered all the promises we had made to the mother, and wished Murrel at Jericho.

Within a dozen yards of our sheltering rocks the footsteps suddenly ceased, and all was quiet.

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Creeping forward to peep round the corner, I put my hand on Thorald's; he seized me and drew me down.

"He's sitting down!" he whispered. "We must wait; he came further than this last night. We shall have him yet."

I slipped back and told Hugh, and we leaned against the boulders and listened. I don't know how long we waited; probably not more than ten minutes; but it seemed fifty to me.

At last we heard a stir among the shingles, as if some one were kicking them about.

"He is coming!" whispered Hugh. "Now then, Guy!"

We heard the footsteps approach, then stop nearly opposite our hiding-place, and a loud, most unghost-like yawn fell upon our ears.

There was a muffled exclamation, and I sprang forward just in time to see Thorald fling his arms round a tall white figure and throw it on the sand.

"Quick, Hugh!" he cried, losing his coolness for once in his life. "Out with the cord!"

In less time than it takes to tell I was twisting a stout cord round a pair of delicate-looking wrists, which struck me forcibly as being by no means suitable for the traditional burglar.

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Hugh performed the same kind office for the feet; not without some difficulty, for our prisoner struggled violently. I got a nice kick on my knee, which made me limp for a week after; but that only added zest to the adventure.

"Now then," said Thorald, "let us have a look at you, my fine fellow."

We lifted him up and let him lean against a rock. As the moonlight shone on his face Murrel gave an astonished exclamation—

"Walter Hertzman! What in the world are *you* doing here?"

I never saw a face so utterly bewildered as our prisoner's as he stood and stared at us. Talk about speechless astonishment! I don't believe he could have spoken then to save his life.

He was a tall, slender young fellow, about Thorald's age, I should say. He had on a long white mackintosh, and a white flannel cricketing cap, which accounted for his ghost-like appearance.

He looked haggard and ill, as if he had not slept for a long time.

I seemed to know his face, but could not call to mind where I had seen it. It was a nice face, too; dark and handsome, and could be pleasant, I dare say; it was anything but pleasant then!

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"What does all this foolery mean?" he asked at last, flushing with anger.

"Exactly what we want to know," said Thorald, beginning to think we had made some mistake. "What are you doing down here, frightening people out of their senses?"

"Doing what?" said young Hertzman, looking as if he thought Thorald would not have far to go.

"Playing the ghost," said Hugh.

"Playing the fool would be more in your line!" was the indignant retort. "Unfasten my hands!"

"It is young Hertzman, who lives at Rydale Farm," said Murrel, recovering a little from his astonishment. "We thought you were a thief, hiding from the police."

"Thank you!" said Hertzman bitterly. "I have not quite come to that yet."

There was something in the tone, I don't know what, which told us there was no question of a practical joke here. Hugh took out his knife and cut the cords, feeling rather foolish as he did it.

"We thought at first you were trying to frighten the villagers," he said apologetically. "At any rate, you have done it. I have no doubt there are half-a-dozen fellows up there now, watching for the ghost."

"Where?" asked Hertzman, looking very much

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as Rip Van Winkle must have done on re-entering the world. Then the comical side of the whole thing struck us all, and we went off into fits of laughter. The ghost watchers had a treat that night!

I thought Hertzman would have a fit, he was so hysterical. His laughing was half crying. We quieted down at last, and then he told us what he was doing there.

He and his sister were orphans, living with a bachelor uncle at Rydale Farm. He was their mother's brother, and had hated their father so intensely that he would not forgive them for being their father's children. Walter he especially disliked, and treated him so badly that at last he had determined to run away and go to sea. The great difficulty had been to find a safe hiding-place till the search for him—if there were any—was over, and he had fixed on Birkett Bay. He knew that no one ever went there, and he had found out a way of getting down. We opened our eyes at that. His sister brought him food and let it down in a basket. He had no idea any one had ever seen him, and when Hugh told him of our watch the previous night, and Bob's fright, I thought he never would stop laughing.

Fortunately we were too near the cliff to be seen

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by any one in the little hollow, though they could see some distance on either side; a projecting rock hid us from view.

"How long do you intend to stay here?" I asked.

"I am going to-morrow. Annette says uncle has been inquiring on the quiet, but seems to take it for granted now that I have got safely off. I have friends who will help me if I can once get to Plymouth."

"You are not fit for the sea," said Hugh bluntly.

Hertzman coloured as if he had been a sensitive girl.

"I am stronger than I look," he said. "Come and see my house."

He took us to a small opening among the rocks, and crawling in we found ourselves in a cave. He pushed a huge stone before the opening and laughed.

"I little thought those fellows were looking for me! There were four of them here this afternoon, and I watched them through this hole. They never saw the opening."

"Oh! Bob has been exploring, has he? I wonder if he is up there now," said Hugh. "You make a capital ghost. What made you fling your arms about in that tragic way?"

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"Did I fling them about? Well, you see, I get rather cramped in here all day, and turn out at night for a stretch. I dare not go out by daylight."

We left our new friend very reluctantly. Hugh tried to persuade him to come with us, but he would not. He was to meet Annette at dawn to say good-bye.

We reached the quay in safety, and fastened the boat up; but somehow or other it got out that we had been round to Birkett Bay, and we were questioned on every hand. We kept our own counsel.

I thought I never should stop laughing when I heard the boys talk of the fearful shrieks which had curdled their blood and made their flesh creep on that dreadful night when they had watched the ghost in Birkett Bay! It came out that there had been a dozen of them up in the hollow, but our peals of laughter had made them take to their heels in terror. It was too good a joke to be spoilt, so we kept our secret, even after all danger to Walter was past. But as the ghost never appeared again we got the credit of laying it, and were looked upon as heroes by the village girls.

We heard from Hertzman a short time after, from Madeira. He was on his way to Cape Town, where

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a friend of his father had promised him employment. Thorald kept up a correspondence with him, and so, after a fashion, did Murrel. In after life they both of them had a good deal to do with him, and we all had cause to be thankful for the circumstances which had led us to Birkett Bay in search of a ghost.

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Him's Little Girl.

ONE Christmas Eve, little Ethel Heath went up to her father, and with sorrowful voice said, as she lovingly and anxiously looked up into his face, "Papa takes no notice of him's little girl!" With an impatient gesture Berkeley Heath pushed the two soft little arms off his knee.

"This child ought to have been in bed an hour ago, Mary; why do you keep her up so late?" he said angrily.

Putting her work on one side, Mary Heath arose and took the little girl in her arms. "Papa is busy thinking, darling," she said gently. "Ethel

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must be a good girl, and not disturb him. Now give him one kiss, and come upstairs to bed."

Scarcely knowing what he was doing, the young father touched the rosy lips, as the child bent from her mother's arms. "Good-night," he said, mechanically, his thoughts wandering far away. "Be a good child, and go to sleep."

The door closed, and he was left alone. The cricket on the hearth chirped merrily, and the cheerful firelight flickered and played on the crimson walls and curtains. He turned the lamp down low, and sat in moody silence, watching the bright flames dart in and out of their brilliant cells. Outside, the rain beat ceaselessly against the window-pane, and the wild wind rushed round the lonely house in eddying gusts. From the distance came the sound of many waters, as the turbid tide of the swollen river flowed heavily on to meet the waves of the mighty ocean. Overhead, he could hear the soft footsteps of his wife, as she moved about, putting the little one to bed, and now and then came the patter of baby feet. On the table beside him were a number of books and papers, toward which he occasionally looked with an air of irritation and annoyance.

"I suppose I ought to do it," he murmured, "but

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it gets harder every day. I wonder what the end of all this will be."

Listlessly he took up one of the books, and glanced down its pages, holding it in the light of the fire.

"All confusion! the book is a disgrace, and yet I"—— He paused irresolutely. "I know perfectly well what I am about," he said aloud. "If the books are not all square by Thursday week, I lose my place, that's certain." Only a little more than a week, and the books were in an almost hopeless state of chaos.

"You cannot do it," came the whispered suggestion. "Take your ease, and don't worry over those confounded books. Let them alone, and if you are turned off, what does it matter? You can get another place fast enough."

"Yes," he said wearily, "I should have no difficulty in getting into Rathlin's. Neal is leaving, and I could step into his place; old Rathlin would be glad to have me, but how long would it last? I suppose I could get the books ready, if I set to work with a will at once. Shall I do it?"

"*Can* you do it?" came the inward voice. "Have you sufficient moral courage to throw off the chains that bind you? You have not, and you

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know it. Set to work with a will, indeed! You have no will, Berkeley Heath—at least, no will for the right. Look at the past year; how many times have you resolved to 'set to, with a will'? Ah, how many times?" The little clock ticked out the passing minutes; overhead the nursery rocking-chair creaked an accompaniment to the mother's evening hymn, as she sang the little one to sleep.

Rising from his seat, Berkeley Heath slowly paced the room. "If I get into Rathlin's, how long shall I stay there?" he murmured. "Only till they find me out, and what shall I do then?"

Wilder and wilder grew the storm outside. Faster fell the mingled snow and rain, and the fierce wind lashed the deep waves into fury.

"I will try! I will make one more effort, and if I fail—God help me!"

He turned up the lamp, and drew his chair to the table. With nervous hands, he gathered up the scattered books and memoranda, and attempted to reduce them to something like order. But the unwonted effort to concentrate his attention bewildered and confused him, and large drops of perspiration gradually gathered on his forehead, and rolled down his face. The figures grew misty, and faded away before his weary eyes. The

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simplest calculation assumed gigantic proportions, and defied his utmost power. Again and again he dipped his pen in the ink, and resumed the struggle, but his face grew haggard with the strain, and his hand fell helpless on the table.

"One more trial! one more trial!" he cried, "and then I'll give it up!"

With passionate desperation he seized the pen, and with trembling fingers essayed to write.

In a lull of the wind came the sound of the sullen river, and the roar of the far-off waves. All wild confusion without, all wild confusion within.

What were the letters doing? What did they mean? rising out of the blackness and darkness, closing round him with iron grasp, stifling his breath, stopping the current of his life-blood, laying cold and icy hands upon his heart! Was he going mad?

"Good heavens!" he cried, with trembling lips, starting to his feet, and gazing with horror-stricken eyes upon the fatal page. "Am I going mad?"

There came no answer; only the dreary moan of the wintry wind seemed to echo the question, and the wild beating of his heart choked his utterance.

"Too late!" he moaned, "too late!" And dashing the pen across the room, he sank into his seat, and laid his head upon his folded arms.

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"What is to be the end of it? what is to be the end of *me?*"

"What matters about the end?" whispered the devil within. "Think of the present; the past is gone, the future is to come; the present only concerns you."

Slowly old habit reasserted her imperious sway, and with furtive glance he rose and opened the door and listened. The nursery door was half opened, and he could hear his wife's voice, as she talked with the wakeful little one. Going up with stealthy steps, he paused and looked in. The child was lying in her mother's arms, her golden hair falling in rich profusion over her shoulders. It was a picture fair enough to gladden any father's heart, and with a strange, dull, aching pain Berkeley Heath remembered the time when he would have gazed upon it with loving pride.

"Is Ethel *always* naughty, mamma? Papa is *always* tross! he never takes no notice of him's little girl."

The little under lip quivered, and the grieved, childish voice was full of tears. Not waiting for the reply, Berkeley turned quickly away, and entered the opposite room. Opening a cupboard he took out a bottle of brandy, and carefully covering it

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with his coat he cautiously left the room. Hastening downstairs, without a glance at the nursery, he once more shut himself in the room below.

He was alone, and the fatal tempter in his own possession. Would he be conquered, or conqueror?

With exultant joy, pitiable in its childish weakness, he held the bottle up to the light. "Brandy!" he whispered, "to me it is the waters of Lethe. It brings oblivion, restfulness, and I *love it!*"

With unsteady hand he poured some into a glass, and as he did so, a fierce struggle went on within him. "Now, or never," said the stern voice of an awakened consciousness. "Take it, and destroy yourself for ever; or throw the cursed draught away, and redeem the past."

"Take it," whispered the evil prompter; "take it, and forget the past in the delicious present."

"Forget the past," he murmured. "Ah! if I could but forget, for ever! but recollection will return."

"Would you forget *all* the past?" pleaded memory. "Would you blot out the happy hours, when you were free from this thrice-cursed thraldom? Think of the days when you first brought your young wife home to happiness and love. Can you forget them?"

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"Forget *them*!" with the words came memories fast and thick of a little home made Paradise by a perfect love; of happy, busy days, of work performed loyally and conscientiously, of words of approval from those who trusted him, and gave him confidence and respect.

Then, like a picture, there rose before him a tiny cot, and a sweet baby face upon the snowy pillow. Over it were bending two figures, and from one came low words of thankfulness and love:

"Our little home angel, Mary. Please God, her life shall be a good and happy one. We will do all we can to make it so, my darling, and *He* will take care of the rest. God bless our little daughter!"

Like a curtain fell the dark shadow of the quiet nursery upstairs; the loving voice and faces faded away, and in their place came a vision of sweet, uplifted blue eyes full of tears, and a little grieved childish voice:

"Papa takes no notice of him's little girl."

Like the sudden uplifting of a mist from the mountain side came torturing recollections of unkind words and harsh looks to the little one, whose life he had promised to make so happy. Fast and thick they crowded upon him, till he stood aghast in their condemning presence.

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"Am I spoiling the young life Thou didst give me?" he groaned. "O God, cannot a man bear the recompense of his own sins? Must the innocent suffer with the guilty?"

Since the days of old, "when man's first disobedience, and the fruit of that forbidden tree, brought death into the world, and all our woe," have the innocent suffered with the guilty, and the reason thereof is one of the hidden mysteries.

In every life, sooner or later, comes a crisis, a halting time; when the fingers clasp round the forbidden fruit, and a deliberate choice has to be made between good and evil.

"If you give way now, you are lost, and your wife's and child's happiness ruined," whispered the faithful, warning voice, as he lifted the glass to his lips. He paused, and looked at the tempting liquor. "I cannot do without it," he answered pleadingly. "It will kill me to leave it off suddenly and altogether. I will do it by degrees."

"Now, at once, and altogether," came the relentless verdict, and the glass fell with a crash on the hearth, and was smashed into atoms. For a minute he sat stupefied into silence. It was gone! The draught that was dear to him as his life. In the

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desperation of despair he turned and seized the bottle.

"I cannot give it up!" he cried feverishly. "It is my *all*."

"Your all? What of your wife, your once happy home, the little one upstairs? Gather up all your strength, Berkeley Heath; throw away the deadly poison *for their sake*."

"For their sake," he repeated dreamily.

"For their sake, and for the sake of all that is good, and noble, and manly in yourself. For the sake of your manhood, do it."

He went to the window, and threw it open. The bare branches of the grand old trees waved to and fro in the resistless wind. Far away in the distance was stretched the wide range of cold, dark sea, and overhead the masses of cloud were hurrying on in tumultuous haste.

"It is just the night for such a deed. *Can* I do it?"

"*Will* you do it?"

He raised his arm. "Just one more draught," whispered the evil tempter.

"God help me! not one!" he cried, and flung the bottle far out into the winter's darkness.

Without pausing one moment to think of what

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he had done, he ran upstairs to the nursery. His wife was just laying the little one in her cot, and looked up in surprise as he entered.

"Is Ethel asleep?"

"No, I'm not asleep; has papa come to kiss him's little girl?" cried the child, her eyes shining with a loving light.

He took her in his arms in silence.

"Papa *does* love him's little girl," she said, gently stroking his cheek.

"Ay," he answered, low, "with a love that has conquered self."

At that moment the bells of the old church close by began to ring a merry Christmas peal, and as Berkeley Heath listened to their music there went up from his very heart a burst of praise, for the peace which that Christmas morning had brought to his heart and home.

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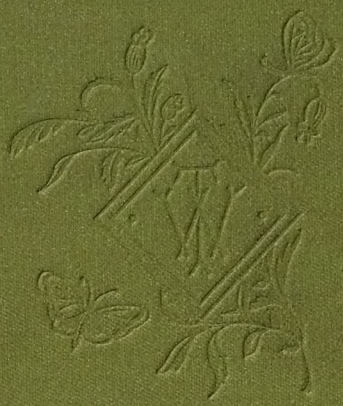

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